

Raptureless

Raptureless

1st Edition

Dr. Jonathan Welton

Praise for *Raptureless*

In our ministry to women and children in prostitution on the streets of Brazil, we see people living every day in what I would describe as hell on earth. Children as young as eight are sold for sex ten to twenty times a night, women are locked away as sex slaves, and constant streams of men look for girls of all ages. We see much tribulation in the lives of these precious ones on the streets of Brazil. As I travel, I often hear comments such as this, “Wow, that is horrible, and the world is only going to get worse before Jesus comes back.”

The problem with this false eschatology—which has been so glamorized by products like *Left Behind*—is that it creates an excuse within the minds of Christians to just leave it to Jesus to clean up the mess. However, He already paid the price to clean up the mess, and He put the broom in our hands and said, “Go into all the world!” I am so appreciative of my friend Jonathan Welton for having the passion and courage to write this book. Although some will call it controversial, I consider it a breath of fresh air! Simple biblical truths, a constant in *Raptureless*, keep controversy at bay, allowing us to thoroughly discover what the Bible really says about the endtimes and discern the current age. Jonathan has been given a gift of understanding the Scriptures, and he puts in the hours and hard work to refine and strengthen that gifting. This is very evident in this book, and I am sure you will be challenged and blessed as you read *Raptureless*.

NIC BILLMAN

Shores of Grace Ministries

Recife, Brazil

www.shoresofgrace.com

Jonathan Welton is a fresh author and ministry that is bringing to light historical truth concerning endtime eschatology in our day. He has taken bold steps to confront the fear-based theology that has paralyzed the Church concerning the “end of the age” mentality, and he has brilliantly composed what I believe to be one of the most biblically and historically correct perspectives on eschatology to date.

If we want to fully move into our personal and corporate destiny, it's crucial we understand *who* we are and *where* we stand biblically in human history. *Raptureless* holds the view that many, if not most, Church Fathers have held—including John Calvin, Charles Spurgeon, John Wesley, and Jonathan Edwards. I highly endorse *Raptureless* by Jonathan Welton. I believe it will be used as a textbook to transform generations to come.

JEFF JANSEN

Senior Leader, Global Fire Church & Global Connect

Global Fire Ministries International

Kingdom Life Institute & Global Fire School of
Supernatural Ministry

Jonathan Welton is a voice to the rising Church. We need his teaching gift stirring the body of Christ to action. In *Raptureless*, Jonathan has revealed his scholarship and ability to communicate on subjects pertinent to the issues facing today's Church. Read it and be challenged. With this much evidence, the reader must make a decision!

DR. HAROLD EBERLE

President, Worldcast Ministries and Publishing

Author, *Victorious Eschatology* and *Who is God?*

Jonathan Welton has taken a bold step in confronting one of the greatest “sacred cows” of our day: endtime theology!

The fear created by the expectation of a coming antichrist and a great tribulation are keeping many believers in bondage. Many believe that defeat is the future destiny of the Church. As Jesus said, human traditions make void the Word of God. In his easy-to-read presentation, Jonathan dismantles many of the popular ideas in the Church about the endtimes.

JOE MCINTYRE

Word of His Grace Church & the Healing Centre

Empowering Grace Ministries

Kenyon's Gospel Publishing Society

Jonathan Welton's new book, *Raptureless*, is a must read. While he covers some ground that has been covered by others before him, he does so in a fresh, crisp, and concise manner. But he also has new insights on various passages of Scripture. His arguments are scriptural and lucid, and they are simply and powerfully presented. In addition, Jonathan provides fresh historical background for a number of the historical sources he has quoted, such as Flavius Josephus. The true significance of these sources establishes the truths presented in *Raptureless*.

GEORGE KOURI

Chancellor of the Apostles Theological Seminary

Presiding Apostle of the Communion of Apostolic
Churches

Senior Pastor of the King's Church

Jacksonville, Florida

Although I've only known Jonathan Welton a short time, I have a huge value for our growing relationship. Jonathan communicates with a skill and an insight beyond his years. His passion for the Word and the truth and his deep

knowledge of history put a rare weight on his teaching. Beyond his transformational truths, I have found Jonathan to be humble, relational, accountable, and passionate for our King and His Kingdom. I have personally benefited from Jonathan's teachings and greatly value him as a gift to our generation.

DAN MCCOLLAM

Director, Sounds of the Nations

Bethel School of the Prophets & School of Supernatural
Worship

Deeper School of Supernatural Life

The Mission, Vacaville, CA

Whenever the prophets of the Bible saw God's people facing difficult times, they acknowledged the problem but pointed people to a brighter future where God would right all wrongs, do "a new thing" in the earth, and offer a new and better way. Jesus did the same—He pointed out the destruction that was facing Jerusalem but also pointed to the brave new world, the Kingdom of God that would grow in our midst, making all things new. Today, Jonathan Welton is one of the people continuing that prophetic tradition. He acknowledges the mess that much of the Church has made (mainly due to faulty theology), but instead of doom and gloom, he offers faith-filled optimism and clear, biblical theology. I highly recommend this book!

DR. MARTIN TRENCH

Co-author, *Victorious Eschatology*

Raptureless: An Optimistic Guide to the End of the World is an amazing new prophetic view that will surely encourage you to be part of what God is doing on earth today!

DOUG ADDISON

Author, *Understand Your Dreams Now*

<http://dougaddison.com>

Raptureless by Jonathan Welton is not just another book about the endtimes; it is a field manual for the twenty-first century that brings fresh hope to a generation who has otherwise lost hope because of the deceptions of endtimes madness! Welton has successfully penned a manifesto that puts an end to the false teachings that so many of us have inherited from our families and churches.

If you are not satisfied with the subjective ideologies that have been imbedded into your mind, making you unsure about what tomorrow may hold, read this book. You may just find that tomorrow holds something genuinely good! This book is destined to transform the mentality of a whole new generation of leaders, and it will change *your* life forever!

SHANE MASON

Preacher, author, and founder of Shane Mason Ministries

Jonathan's new book is long overdue. His clear and detailed teaching exposes numerous myths about the rapture theory and the endtimes. This thought-provoking book will challenge every serious believer who is seeking truth.

GARY OATES

Author, *Open My Eyes, Lord*

International conference speaker

I so appreciate the thought-provoking, well-studied, forthright, and optimistic arguments put forward in Jonathan Welton's *Raptureless*. No matter what your endtime theological inclination is or what you believe about the rapture, the antichrist, and endtime events, *Raptureless*

will give you something to think about. For those who have been around the eschatological block, if you have an appreciation for thoughtful, well-researched discussion and if you have an appreciation for early church perspectives, you will not be disappointed. If you are just cutting your teeth on all this, you will also not be disappointed.

Raptureless is both intriguing and profoundly accessible to even the newest of biblical students. Thank you, Jonathan, for giving us such a well-researched document and presenting these perspectives for honest discussion in the Body. There is never a time when honest, honoring discussion between genuine truth seekers is not enriching. Thank you, Jonathan, for giving us all a lot to think about and talk about. What I most appreciate about *Raptureless*, however, is not the discussion points but rather the heart to see the Church of Jesus Christ get up and get on with the work of bringing His love, glory, and truth to a world that needs that love right now.

FAYTENE GRASSESCHI

Director, TheCRY Movement, MY Canada, & V-Kol
Media

I believe we are in an epoch season during which God is bringing reformation and a new wineskin to the Church. Jonathan is one of many voices who are bringing revelatory insight and a fresh perspective to His people. I have personally observed as a friend the heart of this man to bring truth and break wrong mindsets that have encamped themselves in the Church. He is constantly studying out the Scriptures and is the ultimate learner who is searching out the Scriptures to bring abundant life. I would strongly encourage you to dive in and immerse yourself in the book *Raptureless*. There is a fresh anointing in these pages for God to kill any sacred cows in your life and theology.

CHAD DEDMON

Sometimes it can be hard to find prophetic ministries who truly represent Jesus Christ as He is. One day I was in a small meeting where I believe a true vessel of the voice of Jesus Christ gave me this word: "Jesus says to you, 'I will remove your doomsday mentality and give you a message of hope for My people. I encourage you to give some attention to the topic of the endtimes because My Spirit will teach you about this.'" I was puzzled that the Lord said I had a doomsday mentality. *Did I?*

I bought every possible book and video about the endtimes I could find. Eventually, I threw it all away. Frustrated, I said, "Lord, if you want to show me the truth about the endtimes and give me hope for the future, You will have to do it, because everything I have read, listened to, and watched so far is (sorry for the messengers) one big mess."

Years later, God opened my eyes, transformed my thinking, and showed me how gloriously bright the future of planet earth and humankind is. When the Lord started revealing this to us, I thought I was pretty alone and crazy. But God always speaks to a multitude of wild guys in the desert who are willing to pay the price of listening more to His voice than to the many other voices that yell at us, even (especially?) in the Christian world. So when I discovered Jonathan Welton's book, I was excited and encouraged. God is indeed speaking to many that the future is not dark and gloomy but bright and glorious. Jesus Christ is not the dusk; He is the dawn. *"The path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, that shines brighter and brighter until the full day"* (Prov. 4:18 NASB).

For some readers, it can be quite shocking to read what Jonathan writes. But I encourage you to be brave and trust the Spirit of Truth who leads you into all truth and who

does not lie. If this book is full of deception, the Spirit of God will show you. If Jonathan speaks liberating truth that will bring forth much fruit, the Spirit of Truth will be a witness to you, and His truth will set you free. Do not let fear guide you, but let Him guide you. I believe a brand new insight awaits you. After you have struggled your way through fear, confusion, and questions, you will have a tremendous revelation of Jesus Christ, who is right here with us in His glory and who wants to bring His glory into all the earth, not one day—later—but right now, through you and me, His glorious Bride.

DAVID SORENSEN

iHearGod.com

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Raptureless is a must read! Jonathan Welton does an amazing job of bringing a fresh yet biblical perspective on the endtimes as well as the days we are living in as a Church. This *Kingdom now* book offers a fresh perspective about the victorious Church and Bride whom God is raising up in this hour. Read as Jonathan demystifies and unlocks a lot of the unanswered questions about the endtimes and brings a clear reality to the revelation of Jesus Christ.

JERAME NELSON

Living At His Feet Ministries

Author, *Burning Ones*, *Activating Your Spiritual Senses*, &
Activating Your Dream Language

This rogue, Jonathan Welton, got me—hook, line, and sinker—“caught up” in reading *Raptureless*! Rarely have I come across a book that is so compelling and engrossing, a genuine, un-put-downable, page-turner. How often does one say that about a theology book? But, though it is detailed and scrupulous in its historical insight and

scriptural analysis, this is no mere dry academic treatise. No! This is an essential manual for the victorious Church written by someone who loves the Word and the Spirit.

As a prophetic people and a prophetic Church, it is so important to have the right script inside of us. After all, we prophesy according to our faith. This book will go a long way to help you ensure you have the right faith script inside you—a biblical script with a victorious, glorious final act in which we all have parts to play. That includes you! It's time for you to play your part in advancing the Kingdom!

Jonathan's clear and engaging writing takes the reader on a crescendo of hope, building our faith in the presently increasing Kingdom of Jesus Christ here on earth. *Raptureless* puts the optimistic eschatological view of revivalists and reformers like Wesley, Edwards, and Spurgeon back on the table and is a must-read for all the Word-loving, Spirit-filled Church. You will be encouraged, strengthened, and galvanised as you consume the pages of this book!

DAVID STARK

Co-director, International Network of Prophetic Centres at
Glasgow Prophetic Centre

Scottish Regional Coordinator, Christian International Europe

Jonathan Welton is a prophetic vessel who has a fresh and heavenly perspective that is both cutting-edge and anointed. I have read a couple of Jonathan's books, and I have been challenged and riveted by both his revelation and authenticity. *Raptureless* is a *now* word that addresses one of the most needed messages of the endtimes—hope. Darkness has delighted every time a believer sucks on the bottle of despair, but *Raptureless* feeds the mentality of an endtime revivalist for the glory of God to be released and for the harvest to be unleashed. I'm convinced that any

eschatology that is worth anything is one that inspires you to get up in the morning to fulfill the Great Commission, and Jonathan's book definitely does that!

SEAN SMITH

Author, *I Am Your Sign*

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Jonathan's book, *Raptureless*, boldly exposes the fallacies surrounding much of the contemporary teaching on the endtimes. He presents an understanding of the future that is biblically robust and consistent with the greater part of Church history. Jonathan is masterful in slaying sacred cows and destroying misconceptions that have kept God's people shackled by fear and foreboding. Instead, he brings enlightenment to many Bible passages that have been previously misapplied, especially through the distorting lens of dispensational teaching. He affirms the presence, influence, and growth of God's Kingdom in the here and now—releasing optimism regarding the future. *Raptureless* is a clarion call to biblical perspectives about our present and our future.

IAN ROSSOL

Co-author, *Win the World or Escape the Earth*

Seeing, feeling, tasting, and experiencing the future have their setbacks. One of them is a disdain for futureless people. They've always been around, and they frustrated even the Son of God. When Jesus pronounced to Simon Peter that He had given him the keys of the Kingdom based on His revelation that Jesus was the Son of the living God, Simon must have been overjoyed. However, it took only a few minutes of expanding that revelation to draw out the voice of Satan from that same instrument (see Matt. 16:21–

23). Jesus showed *how* the magnificent Son of God would raise up His Kingdom on the earth.

Whenever there are crises, tribulations, attacks, and persecutions upon the Church as a whole or Christians personally, the cream of the defeatist crap arise, declaring it's the end and finding absolutely no reason to believe this is the prelude to yet another resurrection, another victory, another occupation. And then there's the issue of tribulation and the Great Tribulation. Read what Jonathan writes, and I know you'll agree with me that this book is not only an answer to prayer but a light for a generation that quite simply needs no further encouragement to run from the Church. In *Raptureless*, Jonathan has hit at the heart of the theological lie of escapism, a defeatist dogma that has rendered so many of God's people useless in today's troubled world.

You want a rapture? How about worshiping God? You'll be raptured. It's true. I experience it every day of my life.

KIM CLEMENT

www.kimclement.com

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ISBN

Dedication

To my ever faithful friend and editor, Amy Calkins—your help with all my projects has been invaluable to the Kingdom. I believe Heaven will reward you for helping spread these truths through your writing and editing skills. You have been a mentor, a coach, and a beautiful friend. Thank you.

To the Welton Academy staff—without you, Welton Academy wouldn't exist, and I wouldn't be able to focus on my writing. With all my heart, I say thank you to my team: Linsey Wallace, Sarah Walley, Karina Tripp, Renee Bosco, Sarah Cobb, Gabriel and Louise Lopez, Scott and Charissa Crowder, and Dawn Weaver.

To my dear friends Steve and Joy Hogan as well as Pastor Ralph VanAuken, thank you for believing in me.

Lastly, I thank the Welton Academy charter class (2013–14) for taking a risk and jumping into this new endeavor with me. I am honored by your trust and love. Keep moving in freedom.

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Introduction

My parents both graduated from a Pentecostal Bible college in the early 1970s. They attended classes during the era of the Jesus People Movement, the Vietnam War, and the epically bestselling *Late Great Planet Earth* by Hal Lindsey. During those turbulent times, my parents met and married. After they had my two older siblings, I was born into their family in 1983. This was an era of much speculation and fear regarding the endtimes, which many believed had already begun. My parents had heard all the confusing and conflicting points of view regarding the endtimes, and instead of becoming obsessed with figuring it all out, they made a choice.

They determined to raise godly children who would raise godly grandchildren. They chose to think long-term and invest in their future and the future of their children. They didn't have all the answers for a perfect theology of the endtimes, but they knew better than to buy into the hype. When their friends quit their jobs, bought boats, and racked up credit card debt "because the end of the world is around the corner and we won't have to pay it back," my parents called this irresponsible and unChristlike behavior.

Growing up, I never knew what my parents really thought about the end of the world. When I pressed them for an answer, they would say, "We are pan-millennial," which was a humorous way of saying that it will all "pan out" in the end! This left me with a lot of questions in my teen years when the *Left Behind* series became a raging bestseller.

Since I was not force-fed a particular point of view by either my parents or my church while growing up, I had the full ability to think freely. I began to dig into studying the

endtimes and very quickly realized that this study was going to be deep, complex, and scary.

It didn't take long for me to become thoroughly confused. At that point, I felt the Holy Spirit speak to my heart. He said to me, "*Jonathan, please set aside your study of the endtimes. It is not the right season for you to study this. If you will trust Me, I will guide you to a right understanding in the future, but now is not the time. Wait on Me to give you a green light.*" So, for the next two and half years, I chose to read nothing regarding the endtimes; I didn't watch the *Left Behind* movies (sorry Kirk Cameron); I didn't even read the Book of Revelation!

One day, as I was browsing a used book sale, I saw a book on the endtimes, and I heard the Holy Spirit say to me, "Buy that book; it is time to begin to reveal the truth to you." It has now been over ten years since that day, and what the Holy Spirit has taught me about the endtimes has been some of the most wonderful revelation that I have received from His Word.

Plenty of books about the endtimes have been written based on personal visions or wild interpretations of Scripture. This is not one of those books. I have a master of biblical studies degree and a doctorate in ministry. I am a student of Church history. I am *not* going to fill this book with subjective visions and fantasies regarding private interpretations of the endtimes. Enough books like that already exist, and the Holy Spirit had me avoid them for two and half years so He could prepare my heart for what He wanted to show me.

Here are my starting points.

- Every part of the gospel is simple, including the teaching regarding the endtimes. If something is too complex for

the average person to grasp, then it is being taught *wrongly*.

- Our view of the future should not cause fear. No part of the gospel (which literally means “good news”) ever causes fear.
- Our understanding of the endtimes determines how we live our lives and whether we plan long-term, build a legacy, prepare our children for a lifetime of service to the Lord, and so forth. A correct view of the endtimes will set us free from fear. It will cause us to have a renewed passion for Jesus rather than an obsession with the antichrist.

Since many of you did not grow up in “pan-millennial” households, it is possible that you have been force-fed a particular point of view for many years. I would ask you to lay down what you have heard all your life and consider opening your heart to hear a fresh understanding from the Holy Spirit. In trade, I promise to write simply. I will not to use large theological terms. I will not waste your time. I will not try to coerce you into agreement with me, but I will share with you what the Holy Spirit has shown me, and you can *test all things and hold fast that which is good* (see 1 Thess. 5:21).

Thank you for investing your time in this book; it will be worth it.

Part 1

The PAST Destruction

Chapter 1

The Great Tribulation

During my years of traveling and teaching in churches, I have heard some amazing stories. One lady told me she never showered without wearing a towel because she didn't want to be raptured while naked. Another told me she wouldn't travel on airplanes, not even for missions, because if the antichrist suddenly arose, she might not be able to get back home to her husband. A friend of mine had nightmares for years about the scene in the *Thief in the Night* when the red balloon floats into the sky while people below are being beheaded by guillotines. Perhaps you have heard similar stories or experienced fears like these yourself. Clearly, the idea of a future seven-year, hell-on-earth type of Great Tribulation has created terror in the imaginations of Christians for the last two centuries.

The main passage used to paint this picture of the Great Tribulation comes from the prophecy of Jesus in Matthew 24. Most scholars agree that the Book of Revelation is a parallel to the words of Jesus in Matthew 24, but due to a lack of space, I do not address Revelation in this book.¹ Matthew 24 is the passage that predicts earthquakes, famines, plagues, false teachers, and Jesus' coming on the clouds.

However, as I studied Matthew 24, I discovered that throughout Church history most Christians believed all the events prophesied in Matthew 24 occurred during the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Many well-known Church leaders have taught this, as these quotations from a few of them illustrate:

¹ For my interpretation of the Book of Revelation, see my book, *The Art of Revelation*.

All this occurred in this manner in the second year of the reign of Vespasian [A.D. 70], according to the predictions of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

—Eusebius²

Thousands and thousands of men of every age who together with women and children perished by the sword, by starvation, and by countless other forms of death...all this anyone who wishes can gather in precise detail from the pages of Josephus's history. I must draw particular attention to his statement that the people who flocked together from all Judaea at the time of the Passover Feast and—to use his own words—were shut up in Jerusalem as if in a prison, totaled nearly three million.

—Eusebius³

This was most punctually fulfilled: for after the temple was burned, Titus the Roman general ordered the very foundations of it to be dug up; after which the ground on which it stood was ploughed by Turnus Rufus...this generation of men living shall not pass till all these things be done—The expression implies that a great part of that generation would be passed away, but not the whole. Just so it was; for the city and temple were destroyed thirty-nine or forty years after.

—John Wesley⁴

You will preach everywhere.... Then he added, "This gospel of the kingdom will be preached

² Eusebius, 83.(Book 3, section 5)

³ Ibid., 69.

⁴ Outler.

throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and the end will come.” The sign of this final end time will be the downfall of Jerusalem.

—John Chrysostom⁵

There was a sufficient interval for the full proclamation of the gospel by the apostles and evangelists of the early Christian Church, and for the gathering of those who recognized the crucified Christ as the true Messiah. Then came the awful end which the Saviour foresaw and foretold, and the prospect of which wrung from His lips and heart the sorrowful lament that followed his prophecy of the doom awaiting his guilty capital.

The destruction of Jerusalem was more terrible than anything that the world has ever witnessed, either before or since. Even Titus seemed to see in his cruel work the hand of an avenging God. Truly, the blood of the martyrs slain in Jerusalem was amply avenged when the whole city became a veritable Aceldama, or field of blood.

—Charles Spurgeon⁶

Hence it appears plain enough that the foregoing verses [Matt. 24:1–34] are not to be understood of the last judgment, but, as we said, of the destruction of Jerusalem. There were some among the disciples (particularly John), who lived to see these things come to pass.

—John Lightfoot⁷

⁵ Simonetti, 191.

⁶ *Spurgeon's Popular Exposition of Matthew*, 211.

⁷ Lightfoot, 2:320.

And *Verily I say unto you*; and urge you to observe it, as absolutely necessary in order to understand what I have been saying, *That this generation of men now living shall not pass away until all these things be fulfilled*, for what I have foretold concerning the destruction of the Jewish state is so near at hand, that some of you shall live to see it accomplished with a dreadful exactness.

—Phillip Doddridge⁸

It is to me a wonder how any man can refer part of the foregoing discourse [Matt. 24] to the destruction of Jerusalem, and part to the end of the world, or any other distant event, when it is said so positively here in the conclusion, *All these things shall be fulfilled in this generation*.

—Thomas Newton⁹

This chapter contains a prediction of the utter destruction of the city and temple of Jerusalem, and the subversion of the whole political constitution of the Jews; and is one of the most valuable portions of the new covenant Scriptures, with respect to the *evidence* which it furnishes of the *truth* of Christianity. Every thing which our Lord foretold should come on the temple, city, and people of the Jews, has been fulfilled in the most correct and astonishing manner....

—Adam Clarke¹⁰

Christ informs them, that before a single generation shall have been completed, they will learn by experience the truth of what he has said.

⁸ Doddridge, 1:377.

⁹ Newton, 377.

¹⁰ Clarke, Vol. 3, 225.

For within fifty years the city was destroyed and the temple was razed, the whole country was reduced to a hideous desert.

—John Calvin¹¹

If Jesus and the early church used the relevant language in the same way as their contemporaries, it is highly unlikely that they would have been referring to the actual end of the world, and highly likely that they would have been referring to events within space-time history which they interpreted as the coming of the kingdom.

—N.T. Wright¹²

In this discourse [Matthew 24] Jesus predicts the destruction of the temple, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the dispersion of the Jews, all of which took place in A.D. 70. The uncanny accuracy of these predictions is embarrassing to higher critics....

—R.C. Sproul¹³

The Fulfillment of Matthew 24

These Christian leaders, and many others throughout history, recognized the historical fulfillment of Matthew 24 in the events of the AD 70 destruction of Jerusalem. While many modern fiction writers speculate about what the Great Tribulation will be like in the future, the events of the AD 70 destruction of Jerusalem *already* fulfilled the prophecy of the Great Tribulation. Fortunately, they will never be repeated. In other words, the Great Tribulation is not in the

¹¹ Calvin, 151.

¹² Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 321.

¹³ From the Foreword to *The Parousia* by James Stuart Russell, ix.

future. Yes, life will continue to hold trials, tribulations, and persecutions, but the Great Tribulation or “the Time of Jacob’s Trouble,” as prophesied by Jesus, already happened just as He said it would and within the timeframe He declared (see Matt. 24:34).

Unfortunately, today many Christians are unfamiliar with what happened in AD 70. This makes it easy for them to believe the Great Tribulation is still in the future. In 1805, George Peter Holford wrote a small booklet about the AD 70 destruction—based primarily on the earlier works of Josephus—that is incredibly graphic and heart-wrenching, but also historically accurate. The first time I read Holford’s work, I had tears streaming down my face as I flew on an airplane. Though it is difficult to read because of the graphic content, it is also very important. For that reason, I am including portions of his booklet here.

The Context

Before we get to Holford’s booklet, we must first understand the context of Jesus’ Matthew 24 prophecy. In the chapter prior, Jesus had just unleashed the harshest of His recorded sayings. He had declared a whole chapter’s worth of woes upon the religious leaders and denounced them publically. He ended by saying,

And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Truly I tell you, all this will come on this generation. Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her

wings, and you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate (Matthew 23:35–38).

Jesus' disciples were stunned by His words. As He walked away from the Temple, He said of it, *"Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down"* (Matt. 24:2). In response, the disciples asked Him, *"When will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"* (Matt. 24:3). When Jesus declared that the Temple and its buildings would be destroyed, the disciples, who were no doubt enthralled, asked Him to tell them when this would happen. Jesus replied with eight signs of the coming destruction:

1. False messiahs and false prophets (see Matt. 14:4–5, 11, 23–26)
2. Wars and rumors of wars, nation rising against nation (see Matt. 24:6–7)
3. Famines (see Matt. 24:7)
4. Earthquakes (see Matt. 24:7)
5. Persecution of believers (see Matt. 24:9)
6. Falling away from the faith (see Matt. 24:10)
7. Love growing cold (see Matt. 24:12)
8. The gospel preached in the whole world (see Matt. 24:14)

As we will see in George Peter Holford's booklet, *The Destruction of Jerusalem*, each of these signs was fulfilled in AD 70. An abridged version of Holford's booklet follows, with my additions to Holford's writing set apart as: [Author's notes:].

*The Destruction of Jerusalem*¹⁴

Our Lord commences with a caution: *“Take heed that no man deceive you; for many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ, and shall deceive many”* (Matt. 24:4–5).

The necessity for this friendly warning soon appeared. Within one year after our Lord’s ascension, Dositheus the Samaritan arose, who had the boldness to assert that he was the Messiah of whom Moses prophesied, while his disciple Simon Magus deluded multitudes into a belief that he, himself, was the *“great power of God.”*

About three years afterward, another Samaritan impostor appeared and declared that he would show the people the sacred utensils, said to have been deposited by Moses, in Mount Gerizim. Induced by an idea that the Messiah, their great deliverer, had now come, an armed multitude assembled under him, but Pilate speedily defeated them and slew their chief.

While Cuspius Fadus was procurator in Judea, another deceiver arose, whose name was Theudas. This man actually succeeded so far as to persuade a very great multitude to take their belongings and follow him to Jordan, assuring them that the river would divide at his command. Fadus, however, pursued them with a troop of horses and slayed many of them, including the impostor himself, whose head was cut off and carried to Jerusalem.

Under the government of Felix, deceivers rose up daily in Judea and persuaded the people to follow them into the

¹⁴ The Covenant Media Foundation has given the author, Jonathan Welton, permission to print and use this updated version of George Peter Holford’s written work (www.cmfnow.com). For the author’s original footnotes to his booklet, view the online version. I have omitted them here for simplicity and readability.

wilderness, assuring them that they should there behold conspicuous signs and wonders performed by the Almighty. Of these, Felix, from time to time, apprehended many and put them to death. About this period (AD 55), the celebrated Egyptian impostor arose (also named Felix), who collected thirty thousand followers and persuaded them to accompany him to the Mount of Olives, telling them that from thence they should see the walls of Jerusalem fall down at his command—as a prelude to the capture of the Roman garrison and to their obtaining the sovereignty of the city. The Roman governor, however, apprehending this to be the beginning of revolt, immediately attacked them, slew four hundred of them, and dispersed the rest, but the Egyptian escaped.

In the time of Porcius Festus (AD 60), another distinguished impostor seduced the people by promising them deliverance from the Roman yoke if they would follow him into the wilderness. But Festus sent out an armed force, which speedily destroyed both the deceiver and his followers. In short, impostors to a divine commission continually and fatally deceived the people, at once both justifying the caution and fulfilling the prediction of our Lord.

If it be objected that none of these impostors, except Dositheus, assumed the name of Messiah, we reply that the groveling expectations of the Jews was directed to a Messiah who should merely deliver them from the Roman yoke and *“restore the kingdom to Jerusalem,”* and such were the pretensions of these deceivers. This expectation, indeed, is the only true solution of these strange and reputed insurrections, which will naturally remind the reader of the following prophetic expressions of our Lord: *“I am come in my Father’s name, and you receive me not; if another shall come in his own name, him you will receive.”* *“If they shall say unto you, ‘Behold he is in the*

desert!’ go not forth. They will show (or pretend to show) great signs and wonders.” [See Matthew 24:23–26.]

[Wars and Rumors of Wars]

Our Savior thus proceeded:

And ye shall hear of wars, and rumors of wars; see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet, for nation shall rise up against nation and kingdom against kingdom, and great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences: all these are the beginnings of sorrows (Matthew 24:6–8; Luke 21:11).

“Wars and rumors of wars,” These commotions, like distant thunder, that forebodes the approaching storm, were so frequent from the death of our Lord until the destruction of Jerusalem that the whole interval might be appealed to in illustration of this prophecy. One hundred and fifty of the copious pages of Josephus, which contain the history of this period, are everywhere stained with blood. To particularize a few instances: About three years after the death of Christ, a war broke out between Herod and Aretas, king of Arabia Petraea, in which the army of the former was cut off. This was *“kingdom rising against kingdom.”*

Wars are usually preceded by rumors. It may, therefore, appear absurd to attempt a distinct elucidation of this part of the prophecy; nevertheless, it ought not to be omitted that, about that time, the emperor Caligula, having ordered his statue to be placed in the Temple of Jerusalem, and the Jews having persisted to refuse him, the whole nation was so much alarmed by the mere apprehension of war that they neglected even to till their lands! The storm, however, blew over.

About this period, a great number of Jews, on account of a pestilence that raged at Babylon, removed from that

city to Seleucia, where the Greeks and Syrians rose against them and destroyed of this devoted people more than fifty thousand! "The extent of this slaughter," says Josephus, "had no parallel in any former period of their history." Again, about five years after this dreadful massacre, there happened a severe contest between the Jews at Perea and the Philadelphians regarding the limits of a city called Mia, and many of the Jews were slain. This was "*nation rising up against nation.*"

Four years afterward, under Cumanus, a Roman soldier offered an indignity to the Jews within the precincts of the Temple. This they violently resented, but upon the approach of the Romans in great force, their terror was so excessive and their flight so disorderly that not less than ten thousand Jews were trodden to death in the streets. This, again, was "*nation rising up against nation.*" Four years more had not elapsed before the Jews made war against the Samaritans and ravaged their country. The people of Samaria had murdered a Galilean, who was going up to Jerusalem to keep the Passover, and the Jews thus revenged it.

At Caesarea, the Jews had a sharp contention with the Syrians for the government of the city, and an appeal was made to who decreed it to the Syrians. This event laid the foundation of a most cruel contest between the two nations. The Jews, mortified by disappointment and inflamed by jealousy, rose against the Syrians, who successfully repelled them. In the city of Caesarea alone, upwards of twenty thousand Jews were slain. The flame, however, was not now quenched; it spread its destructive rage wherever the Jews and Syrians dwelt together in the same place: throughout every city, town, and village, mutual animosity and slaughter prevailed. At Damascus, Tyre, Ascalon, Gadara, and Scythopolis, the carnage was dreadful. At the first of these cities, ten thousand Jews were slain in one

hour, and at Scythopolis, thirteen thousand treacherously in one night.

At Alexandria, the Jews, aggrieved by the oppressions of the Romans, rose against them. But the Romans, gaining the ascendancy, slew of that nation fifty thousand persons, sparing neither infants nor the aged. And after this, at the siege of Jopata, not less than forty thousand Jews perished.

While these destructive contests prevailed in the East, the western parts of the Roman Empire were rent by the fierce contentions of Galba, Otho, and Vertellis. Of which three emperors, it is remarkable that they all, together with Nero, their immediate predecessor, died a violent death within the short space of eighteen months. Finally, the whole nation of the Jews took up arms against the Romans, King Agrippa, etc. and provoked that dreadful war which, in a few years, deluged Judea in blood and laid its capital in ruins.

If it be here objected, that, because wars are events of frequent occurrence, it would be improper to refer to supernatural foresight in a successful prediction respecting them, I would here reply that much of this objection will be removed by considering the incompetency of even statesmen themselves in foretelling the condition, only for a few years, of the very nation whose affairs they administer. It is a well-known fact that the present minister of Great Britain, [at the time of authorship, 1805, the Prime Minister was William Pitt] on the very eve of the late long and destructive war with the French Republic, held out to this country a picture of fifteen successive years of peace. Indeed, the points on which peace and war often depend baffle all calculations from present aspects, and a rumor of war that is so loud and so alarming as even to suspend the operations of farming may terminate, as we have just seen, into nothing but rumor.

Further, let it be considered that the wars to which this part of our Lord's prophecy referred were to be of two kinds and that the events corresponded accordingly. They occurred within the period to which he had assigned them, and they fell with the most destructive severity on the Jews, to whom the prophecy at large chiefly related. Further, that the person who predicted them was not a statesman, but a carpenter's son! On this subject, more in another place.

[**Authors note:** Jesus declared "*wars and rumors of wars*" during the *Pax Romana*, the "Roman Peace," which was the only time in history when war had essentially ceased because the empire had conquered all of its enemies. At any other time in history, wars would have been a poor "sign of the times" because wars are always happening.]

[Earthquakes]

"*And great earthquakes shall be in divers places.*" Of these significant emblems of political commotion, there occurred several within the scene of this prophecy, and as our Savior predicted, they happened in divers places. In the reign of Claudius, there was one at Rome and another at Apamea in Syria, where many of the Jews resided. The earthquake at Apamea was so destructive that the emperor, in order to relieve the distresses of the inhabitants, cancelled their requirement to pay tribute for five years. Both these earthquakes are recorded by Tacitus. There was one also, during the same reign, in Crete. This is mentioned by Philostratus in his *Life of Apollonius*, who also says that there were others "at Smyrna, Miletus, Chios, and Samos; in all which places Jews had settled."

In the reign of Nero, there was an earthquake at Laodicea. Tacitus records this also. It is likewise mentioned by Eusebius and Orosius, who add that Hieropolis and Colose, as well as Laodicea, were overthrown by earthquakes. There was also one in Campania during this reign (of this both Tacitus and Seneca speak) and another at

Rome in the reign of Galba, recorded by Suetonius. To all those may be added the earthquakes that happened on the dreadful night when the Idumeans were excluded from Jerusalem, a short time before the siege commenced. Josephus says, *“A heavy storm burst on them during the night; violent winds arose, accompanied with the most excessive rains, with constant lightnings, most tremendous thunderings, and with dreadful roarings of earthquakes. It seemed as if the system of the world had been confounded for the destruction of mankind; and one might well conjecture that these were signs of no common events!”*

[**Authors note:** There are many records regarding this time period having an incredible amount of earthquakes in the localized region. Theologian and author, J. Marcellus Kik, wrote:

And as to earthquakes, many are mentioned by writers during a period just previous to 70 AD. There were earthquakes in Crete, Smyrna, Miletus, Chios, Samos, Laodicea, Hierapolis, Colosse, Campina, Rome, and Judea. It is interesting to note that the city of Pompeii was much damaged by an earthquake occurring on February 5, 63 AD.¹⁵

Another Bible scholar, Henry Alford, wrote about the earthquakes of this period:

The principle earthquakes occurring between this prophecy and the destruction of Jerusalem [in AD 70] were, (1) a great earthquake in Crete, A.D. 46 or 47; (2) one at Rome on the day when Nero assumed manly toga, A.D. 51; (3) one at Apamea in Phrygia, mentioned by Tacitus, A.D. 53; (4) one

¹⁵ Kik, *Matthew Twenty-Four Exposition*, 93.

at Laodicea in Phrygia, A.D. 60; (5) one in Capania.¹⁶

Commentator Edward Hayes Plumptre writes:

Perhaps no period in the world's history has ever been so marked by these convulsions as that which intervenes between the Crucifixion and the destruction of Jerusalem.¹⁷

Seneca, the famed philosopher and mentor of Nero, also wrote of this phenomenon:

How often have cities in Asia, how often in Achaia, been laid low by a single shock of earthquake! How many towns in Syria, how many in Macedonia, have been swallowed up! How often has this kind of devastation laid Cyprus in ruins! How often has Paphos collapsed! Not infrequently are tidings brought to us of utter destruction of entire cities.¹⁸

Also, many earthquakes are mentioned in the New Testament, including at Jesus death (see Matt. 27:51–52) and again at His resurrection (see Matt. 28:2). Earthquakes also happened when the building was shaken in Acts 4:31 and when Paul and Silas were freed from prison in Philippi (see Acts 16:26). During the time period Jesus predicted, earthquakes were rampant.]

[Famines]

Our Lord also predicted “*famines*.” Of these, the principal one was that which the Prophet Agabus foretold would happen in the days of Claudius, as related in the Acts of the Apostles. It begun in the fourth year of his reign and

¹⁶ Alford, 163.

¹⁷ Plumptre, “The Gospel According to St. Matthew,” 6:146.

¹⁸ Seneca, *Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales*, 437.

was of long continuance. It extended through Greece and even into Italy, but was felt most severely in Judea and especially at Jerusalem, where many perished for want of bread. This famine is recorded by Josephus also, who relates that “*an assaron of corn was sold for five drachmae*” [i.e. one day of food cost about a week’s wages] it is likewise noted by Eusebius and Orosius. To alleviate this terrible calamity, Helena, queen of Adiabena, who was at that time in Jerusalem, ordered large supplies of grain to be sent from Alexandria, and Izates, her son, consigned vast sums to the governors of Jerusalem to be applied to the relief of the more indigent sufferers. The gentile Christian converts residing in foreign countries also sent, at the instance of Saint Paul, liberal contributions to relieve the distresses of their Jewish brethren (see 1 Cor. 16:3).

Dion Cassius relates that there was likewise a famine in the first year of Claudius that prevailed at Rome and in other parts of Italy. And in the eleventh year of the same emperor, there was another famine mentioned by Eusebius. To these may be added the famines that afflicted the inhabitants of several of the cities of Galilee and Judea, which were besieged and taken previous to the destruction of Jerusalem, where the climax of national misery, arising from famine and every other cause, was so awfully completed.

[Authors note: The famine predicted by Agabus and discussed above is mentioned in Acts 11:28–30 and First Corinthians 16:1–3.]

[Pestilences]

Our Savior adds “*pestilences*” (see Luke 21:11), likewise. Pestilence treads upon the heels of famine; it may, therefore, reasonably be presumed that this terrible scourge accompanied the famines, which have just been recounted above. History, however, particularly distinguishes two

instances of this calamity that occurred before the commencement of the Jewish war. The first took place at Babylon about AD 40, and it raged so alarmingly that great multitudes of Jews fled from that city to Seleucia for safety, as has been hinted at already. The other happened at Rome in AD 65, and it carried off prodigious multitudes. Both Tacitus and Suetonius also record that similar calamities prevailed during this period in various parts of the Roman Empire.

After Jerusalem was surrounded by the army of Titus, pestilential diseases soon made their appearance there to aggravate the miseries and deepen the horrors of the siege. They were partly occasioned by the immense multitudes that were crowded together in the city, partly by the putrid emanations that arose from the unburied dead, and partly from the spread of famine.

[Heavenly Signs]

Our Lord proceeded, "*And fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven*" (Luke 21:11). Josephus has collected the chief of these occurrences together and introduces his account by a reflection on the strangeness of these events that could induce his countrymen to give credit to impostors and unfounded reports, while they disregarded the divine admonitions that were confirmed, as he [Josephus] asserts they were, by the following extraordinary signs:

1. "A meteor, resembling a sword, hung over Jerusalem during one whole year." This could not be a comet, for it was stationary, and was visible for twelve successive months. A sword too, though a fit emblem for destruction, but ill represents a comet."
2. "On the eighth of the month Zanthicus, (before the feast of unleavened bread) at the ninth hour of the night, there shone round about the altar, and the

circumjacent buildings of the temple, a light equal to the brightness of the day, which continued for the space of half an hour.” This could not be the effect of lightning, nor of a vivid aurora borealis, for it was confined to a particular spot, and the light shone uninterrupted for thirty minutes.

3. “As the High Priest were leading a heifer to the altar to be sacrificed, she brought forth a lamb, in the midst of the temple.” Such is the strange account given by Josephus. Some may regard it as a “Grecian fable,” while others may discern in this prodigy a miraculous rebuke of Jewish infidelity and impiety, for rejecting the antitypical Lamb, who had offered Himself as an atonement “once for all” and who, by thus completely fulfilling their design, had virtually abrogated the Levitical sacrifices. However this may be, the circumstances of the prodigy are remarkable. It did not occur in an obscure part of the city, but in the Temple; it did not at an ordinary time, but at the Passover—the season of our Lord’s crucifixion—in the presence, not of the vulgar merely, but of the High Priests and their attendants, and when they were leading the sacrifice to the altar.
4. “About the sixth hour of the night, the eastern gate of the temple was seen to open without human assistance.” When the guards informed the Curator of this event, he sent men to assist them in shutting it, and with great difficulty they succeeded. This gate, as has been observed already, was of solid brass and required twenty men to close it every evening. It could not have been opened by a “strong gust of wind,” or a “slight earthquake” for, as Josephus says, “It was secured by iron bolts and

bars that were let down into a large threshold, consisting of one entire stone.”

5. “Soon after the feast of the Passover, in various parts of the country, before the setting of the sun, chariots and armed men were seen in the air, passing round about Jerusalem.” Neither could this portentous spectacle be occasioned by the aurora borealis, for it occurred before the setting of the sun; nor could it have been merely the fancy of a few villagers, gazing at the heavens, for it was seen in various parts of the country.
6. “At the subsequent feast of Pentecost, while the priests were going, by night, into the inner temple to perform their customary ministrations, they first felt, as they said, a shaking, accompanied by an indistinct murmuring, and afterwards voices as of a multitude, saying, in a distinct and earnest manner, ‘let us depart hence’.” This gradation will remind the reader of that awful transaction that the feast of Pentecost was principally instituted to commemorate.

First, a shaking was heard; this would naturally induce the priests to listen, An unintelligible murmur succeeds it; this would more powerfully arrest their attention, and while it was thus awakened, they heard, says Josephus, the voices, as of a multitude, distinctly pronouncing the words, “let us depart hence.” And accordingly, before the period for celebrating this feast returned, the Jewish war had commenced, and in the space of three years afterward, Jerusalem was surrounded by the Roman army, the temple converted into a citadel, and its sacred courts streaming with the blood of human victims.

7. As the last and most fearful omen, Josephus relates that one Jesus, the son of Ananus, a rustic of the lower class, during the Feast of Tabernacles, suddenly exclaimed in the temple, "A voice from the east a voice from the west—a voice from the four winds—a voice against Jerusalem and the temple—a voice against bridegrooms and brides—a voice against the whole people!" These words he incessantly proclaimed aloud, both day and night, through all the streets of Jerusalem for seven years and five months together. He began at a time (AD 62) when the city was in a state of peace and was overflowing with prosperity, and he ceased amidst the horrors of the siege.

This disturber, having excited the attention of the magistracy, was brought before Albinus the Roman governor, who commanded that he should be scourged. But the severest stripes drew from him neither tears nor supplications. As he never thanked those who relieved him, so neither did he complain of the injustice of those who struck him. And no other answer could the governor obtain to his interrogatories, but his usual denunciation of "Woe, woe to Jerusalem!" which he still continued to proclaim through the city, but especially during the festivals, when his manner became more earnest and the tone of his voice louder. At length, on the commencement of the siege, he ascended the walls and, in a more powerful voice than ever, exclaimed, "Woe, woe to this city, this temple, and this people!" And then, with a presentment of his own death, added, "Woe, woe to myself!" He had scarcely uttered these words when a stone from one of the Roman catapults killed him on the spot.

Such are the prodigies related by Josephus, and excepting the first, he places them in the year immediately preceding the Jewish war. Several of them are recorded also by Tacitus. Whatever the fact, it is clear that these events correspond to our Lord's prediction of "fearful sights and great signs from heaven" and ought to be deemed a sufficient answer to the objector who demands whether any such appearances are respectably recorded.

[Great Persecution]

The next prediction of our Lord related to the persecution of His disciples: "*They shall lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake;*" (Luke 21:12)—"*and they shall deliver you up to councils, and in the synagogues ye shall be beaten;*" (Mark 13:9)—"*and some of You shall they cause to be put to death*" (Luke 21:16). In the very infancy of the Christian Church, these unmerited and unprovoked cruelties began to be inflicted.

Our Lord and his forerunner, John the Baptist, had already been put to death. The apostles Peter and John were first imprisoned, and then, together with the other apostles, were scourged before the Jewish council. Stephen, after confounding the Sanhedrim with his irresistible eloquence, was stoned to death. Herod Agrippa "*stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church,*" beheaded James the brother of John, and again imprisoned Peter, planning to put him to death also.

Saint Paul pleaded before the Jewish council at Jerusalem and before Felix the Roman governor, who trembled on the judgment-seat, while the intrepid prisoner "*reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come!*" Two years afterward, he was brought before the tribunal of Festus (who had succeeded Felix in the government). King Agrippa the younger was present and,

while the governor scoffed, ingenuously acknowledged the force of the apostle's eloquence and, half-convinced, exclaimed, "*Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.*" Lastly, he pleaded before the emperor Nero at Rome. He was also brought with Silas before the rulers at Philippi, where both of them were scourged and imprisoned. Paul was likewise imprisoned two years in Judea and afterward twice at Rome, each time for the space of two years. He was scourged by the Jews five times, thrice beaten with rods, and once stoned.

Paul himself, before his conversion, was also an instrument of fulfilling the predictions. Saint Luke relates of him that "*he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and hating men and women, committed them to prison; when they were put to death he gave his voice against them; he punished them oft in every synagogue, and, persecuted them even into strange cities*"; and to this agree his own declarations (Acts 26:10–11; see Gal. 1:23).

At length, about two years before the Jewish war, the first general persecution commenced at the instigation of the emperor Nero, "who," says Tacitus, "inflicted upon the Christians punishments exquisitely painful." Multitudes suffered a cruel martyrdom amidst derision and insults, and among the rest, were the venerable apostles Saint Peter and Saint Paul.

Our Lord continues—"And ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake" (Matt. 24:9). The hatred from which the above-recited persecutions sprang was not provoked on the part of the Christians by a resistance to established authority or by any violations of law, but was the unavoidable consequence of their sustaining the name and imitating the character of their master. "It was a war," says Tertullian, "against the very name; to be a Christian was of itself crime enough." And to the same effect is that expression of Pliny in his letter to Trajan: "*I asked them*

whether they were Christians; if they confessed it, I asked them a second and a third time, threatening them with punishment, and those who persevered I commanded to be led away to death.” It is added, *“Of all nations.”* Whatever animosity or dissensions might subsist between the gentiles and the Jews on other points, they were at all times ready to unite and co-operate in the persecution of the humble followers of Him who came to be a light to the former and the glory of the latter.

[Cold Love]

“And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another” (Matt. 24:10). Concerning this fact, the following decisive testimony of Tacitus may suffice. Speaking of the persecutions of the Christians under Nero, to which we have just alluded, he adds, *“Several were seized, who confessed, and by their discovery a great multitude of others were convicted and barbarously executed.”*

[Author’s note: Matthew 24:10–12 may also be in reference to the many false teachings of the first century church, which caused many believers to step away from love of Christ into aberrant forms of the faith, such as the Gnostics, Judaizers, and Nicolaitians.

As the scholar David Chilton wrote:

We generally think of the apostolic period as a time of tremendously explosive evangelism and Church growth, a “golden age” when astounding miracles took place every day. This common image is substantially correct, but it is flawed by one glaring omission. We tend to neglect the fact that the early Church was the scene of *the most dramatic out-break of heresy in world history.*

But the problem of heresy was not limited to any geographical or cultural area. It was widespread and became an increasing subject of apostolic

counsel and pastoral oversight as the age progressed. Some heretics taught that the final Resurrection had already taken place (2 Tim. 2:18), while others claimed that resurrection was impossible (1 Cor. 15:12); some taught strange doctrines of asceticism and angel-worship (Col. 2:8, 18-23; 1 Tim. 4:1-3), while others advocated all kinds of immorality and rebellion in the name of “liberty” (2 Peter 2:1-3, 10-22; Jude 4, 8, 10-13, 16). Again and again the apostles found themselves issuing stern warnings against tolerating false teachers and “false apostles” (Rom. 16:17-18; 2 Cor. 11:3-4, 12-15; Phil. 3:18-19; 1 Tim. 1:3-7; 2 Tim. 4:2-5), for these had been the cause of massive departures from the faith, and the extent of apostasy was increasing as the era progressed (1 Tim. 1:19-20, 6:20-21; 2 Tim. 2:16-18, 3:1-9, 13, 4:10, 14-16). One of the last letters of the New Testament, the Book of Hebrews, was written to an entire Christian community on the very brink of wholesale abandonment of Christianity. The Christian Church of the first generation was not only characterized by faith and miracles; it was also characterized by increasing lawlessness, rebellion, and heresy from within the Christian community itself—just as Jesus had foretold in Matthew 24.^{19]}

[Gospel Preached in the Whole World]

“And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations, and then shall the end (i.e. of the Jewish dispensation) come” (Matt. 24:14). Of the fulfillment of this prediction of the epistles

¹⁹ Chilton, *The Great Tribulation*, 29-31.

of Saint Paul—addressed to the Christians at Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colosse, Thessalonica—and those of Peter—to such as resided in Pontus, Cappadocia, and Bithynia—are monuments now standing. For neither of these apostles were living when the Jewish war commenced. Saint Paul, too, in his epistle to the Romans, informs them that *“their faith was spoken of throughout the world”* (Rom. 1:8); and in that to the Colossians he observes that the *“gospel had been preached to every creature under heaven”* (Col. 1:23). Clement, who was a fellow-laborer with the apostle, relates of him that *“he taught the whole world righteousness, travelling from the East westward to the borders of the ocean.”* Eusebius says that *“the Apostles preached the gospel in all the world, and that some of them passed beyond the bounds of the ocean, and visited the Britannic isles”*; so says Theodoret also.

“It appears,” says Bishop Newton, “from the writers of the history of the church, that before the destruction of Jerusalem, the gospel was not only preached in the Lesser Asia, and Greece, and Italy, the great theatres of action then in the world, but was likewise propagated as far northward as Scythia, as far southward as Ethiopia, as far eastward as Parthia and India, as far westward as Spain and Britain.” And Tacitus asserts that “the Christian religion, which arose in Judea, spread over many parts of the world, and extended to Rome itself, where the professors of it, as early as the time of Nero, amounted to a vast multitude,” insomuch that their numbers excited the jealousy of the government.

Thus completely was fulfilled a prediction contrary to every conclusion that could have been grounded on moral probability and to the accomplishment of which every kind of impediment was incessantly opposed. The reputed son of a carpenter instructs a few simple fishermen in a new

dispensation destitute of worldly incentives, but full of self-denials, sacrifices, and sufferings, and he tells them that in about forty years it should spread over the entire world. It spreads accordingly, and in defiance of the bigotry of the Jews and the authority, power, and active opposition of the gentiles, it is established, within that period, in all the countries into which it penetrates. Can anyone doubt that the prediction and its fulfillment were equally divine?

[**Author's note:** The root word *oikoumene*, used for "world" in this passage, actually means "inhabited or civilized world," not world as in global planet earth (that would be the Greek word *kosmos*). This is the same Greek word used in Luke 2:1: "*Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all **the inhabited earth.***"

The apostle Paul used this same word later to confirm four times that the gospel had reached the whole civilized world as Jesus predicted (see Rom. 1:8; 10:18; Col 1:5–6,23).

As Philip Doddridge wrote in 1807:

It appears, from the most credible records, that the *gospel* was preached in Idumea, Syria, and Mesopotamia, by Jude; in Egypt, Marmorica, Mauritania, and other parts of Africa, by Mark, Simon, and Jude; in Ethiopia, by Candace's Eunuch and Mattias; in Pontus, Galatia, and the neighboring parts of Asia, by Peter; in territories of the seven Asiatic churches, by John; in Parthia, by Matthew; in Scythia, by Philip and Andrew; in the northern and western parts of Asia, by Bartholomew; in Persia, by Simon and Jude; in Media, Carmania, and several eastern parts, by Thomas; through the vast tract from Jerusalem round about to Illyricum, by Paul, as also in Italy, and probably in Spain, Gaul, and Britain; in most

of which places Christian churches were planted, in less than thirty years after the death of Christ, which was before *the destruction of Jerusalem*.²⁰

Jesus was saying that the gospel would be preached throughout the Roman Empire before He would come in judgment upon Jerusalem and the Temple. He was right. This has been fulfilled, and it has no further fulfillment in our future. We *are not* waiting for every person to hear the gospel so that the rapture can suddenly take place.^{21]}

[The Beginning of the War]

Such, briefly, is the account that history gives of the several events and signs that our Lord said would precede the destruction of the Holy City. No sooner were his predictions regarding the spread of the gospel accomplished than a most unaccountable state of mind seized upon the whole Jewish nation so that they not only provoked, but seemed even to rush into the midst of those unparalleled calamities that, at length, totally overwhelmed them. In an essay of this sort, it is impossible to enter into a minute detail of the origin and progress of these evils, but such particulars as illustrate the fulfillment of the remaining part of the prophecy and justify the strong language used shall be presented to the reader.

From the conquest of their country by Pompey, about 60 BC, the Jews had, on several occasions, manifested a refractory spirit. But after Judas the Gaulonite and Sadduc the Pharisee taught them that submission to the Romans would pave the way to a state of abject slavery, this temper displayed itself with increasing malignity and violence. Rebellious tumults and insurrections became more frequent

²⁰ Doddridge, 2:365.

²¹ Gary DeMar, *Ten Popular Prophecy Myths Exposed and Answered*, Chapter 8, "The Myth that the Gospel Has Yet to be Preached in the 'Whole World.'"

and alarming, and to these, the mercenary Florus, the Roman governor, contributed a great deal. At length, Eleazer, son of the High Priest, persuaded those who officiated in the Temple to reject the sacrifices of foreigners and to no longer offer up prayers for them. Thus an insult was thrown upon Caesar, his sacrifice was rejected, and the foundation of the Roman war was laid.

The disturbances among the Jews still continuing, Cestius Gallus, president of Syria, marched an army into Judea in order to quell them, and his career was everywhere marked with blood and desolation. As he proceeded, he plundered and burned the beautiful city of Zabulon, Joppa, and all the villages that lay in his way. At Joppa, he killed 8,400 of the inhabitants. He laid waste the district of Narbatene and, sending an army into Galilee, killed there 2,000 of the seditious Jews. He then burned the city of Lydda, and after repelling the Jews, who made a desperate attempt against him, he encamped at the distance of about one mile from Jerusalem. On the fourth day, he entered its gate and burned three divisions of the city. He may have, by its capture at that time, put an end to the war, but instead of pursuing his advantages, through the treacherous persuasions of his officers, he most surprisingly stopped the siege and fled from the city with great haste.

The Jews, however, pursued him as far as Antipatris and, with little loss to themselves, slew nearly 6,000 men of his army. After this disaster had befallen Cestius, the wealthier Jews (says Josephus) forsook Jerusalem as men do a sinking ship. And it is with reason supposed that, on this occasion, many of the Christians, or converted Jews, who dwelled there—remembering the warnings or their divine Master, retired to Pella, a place beyond Jordan situated in a mountainous country (Matt. 24:16). There (according to Eusebius, who resided near the spot) they came from Jerusalem and settled before the war (under

Vespasian) began. Other providential opportunities for escaping afterward occurred, of which, it is probable, those who were now left behind availed themselves. It is a striking act, one that cannot be contemplated by the pious mind without devout admiration, that history does not record that even one Christian perished in the siege of Jerusalem. Enduring to the end and faithful to their blessed master, they gave credit to his predictions and escaped the calamity. Thus were fulfilled the words of our Lord, "*He that shall endure unto the end* (i.e. of the scene of this prophecy) *shall be saved*" (Matt. 24:13) from the calamities that would overtake all those who continued obstinate in unbelief.

[Time to Flee (Matt. 24:15,21)]

Nero, having been informed of the defeat of Cestius, immediately appointed Vespasian, a man of tried valor, to lead the war against the Jews. He, assisted by his son, Titus, soon collected at Ptolemais an army of 60,000 men. From there, in the spring of AD 67, he marched into Judea, everywhere spreading the most cruel havoc and devastation—the Roman soldiers, on various occasions, sparing neither infants nor the aged. For fifteen months, Vespasian proceeded during which period he reduced all the strong towns of Galilee and the chief of those in Judea, destroying at least 150,000 of the inhabitants.

Among the terrible calamities, which at this time happened to the Jews, those that befell them at Joppa, which had been rebuilt, deserve particular notice. Their frequent piracies had provoked the vengeance of Vespasian. The Jews fled before his army to their ships, but a tempest immediately arose and pursued those who had set out to sea, and it capsized them. The rest were dashed, vessel against vessel and against the rocks, in the most tremendous manner. In this way, many were drowned, some were crushed by the broken ships, others killed

themselves, and those who reached the shore were slain by the merciless Romans. The sea for a long space was stained with blood; 4,200 dead bodies were strewn along the coast, and (dreadful to relate) not an individual survived to report this great calamity at Jerusalem. Such events were foretold by our Lord, when he said, "*There shall be distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring*" (Luke 21:25).

Vespasian, after proceeding as far as Jericho, returned to Caesarea in order to make preparation for his grand attempt against Jerusalem. While he was thus occupied, he received news of the death of Nero. Not knowing what the will of the future emperor might be, he prudently resolved to suspend, for the present, the execution of his design. Thus, the Almighty gave the Jews a second respite, which continued nearly two years. But they did not repent of their crimes; neither were they in the least degree repentant, but rather proceeded to acts of still greater enormity. The flame of civil dissension again burst out and with more dreadful fury.

In the heart of Jerusalem, two factions contended for the sovereignty and raged against each other with ruthless and destructive animosity. A division of one of these factions, having been excluded from the city, forcibly entered it during the night. Athirst for blood and inflamed by revenge, they spared neither age, sex, nor infancy, and the morning beheld 8,500 dead bodies lying in the streets of the holy city. They plundered every house, and having found the chief priests, Anaius and Jesus, they not only killed them, but also insulted their bodies by casting them forth unburied. They slaughtered the common people as unfeelingly as if they had been a herd of the vilest beasts. The nobles they first imprisoned and scourged, and when they could not by these means convince them to join their party, they bestowed death upon them as a favor. Of the

higher classes, 12,000 perished in this manner. And no one dared to shed a tear or utter a groan openly through fear of a similar fate. Death, indeed, was the penalty of the lightest and heaviest accusations, and none escaped through the lowness of their rank or their poverty. Those who fled were intercepted and slain, and their carcasses lay in heaps on all the public roads. Every symptom of pity seemed utterly extinguished and, with it, all respect for authority, both human and divine.

While Jerusalem was a prey to these ferocious and devouring factions, every part of Judea was scourged and laid waste by bands of robbers and murderers, who plundered the towns. In the case of resistance, they killed the inhabitants, not sparing either women or children. Simon, son of Gioras, the commander of one of these bands of 40,000, with some difficulty entered Jerusalem and gave birth to a third faction. Thus the flame of civil discord blazed out again, with still more destructive fury. The three factions, rendered frantic by drunkenness, rage, and desperation, trampling on heaps of slain people, fought against each other with brutal savageness and madness. Even those who brought sacrifices to the Temple were murdered. The dead bodies of priests and worshippers, both natives and foreigners, were heaped together, and a lake of blood stagnated in the sacred courts.

John Levi of Gischala, who headed one of the factions, burnt storehouses full of provisions, and Simon, his great antagonist, who headed another of them, soon afterward followed his example. Thus they cut the very sinews of their own strength. At this critical and alarming conjuncture, intelligence arrived that the Roman army was approaching the city. The Jews were petrified with astonishment and fear; there was no time for counsel, no hope of pacification, no means of flight: all was wild disorder and perplexity. Nothing was to be heard but "*the*

confused noise of the warrior,”—nothing to be seen but *“garments rolled in blood,”*—nothing to be expected from the Romans but exemplary vengeance. A ceaseless cry of combatants was heard day and night, and yet the lamentations of mourners were still more dreadful. The consternation and terror that now prevailed induced many inhabitants to desire that a foreign foe might come, and affect their deliverance. Such was the horrible condition of the place when Titus and his army presented themselves and encamped before Jerusalem.

But, alas—he came not to deliver it from its miseries, but to fulfill the prediction and vindicate the benevolent warning of our Lord: *“When ye see (he had said to his disciples) the abomination of desolation, spoken or by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place, and Jerusalem surrounded by armies (or camps) then let those who are in the midst of Jerusalem depart, and let not those who are in the country enter into her,”* for *“then know that the desolation thereof is nigh”* (Matt. 24:15–16; Luke 21:20, 1–11). These armies, we do not hesitate to affirm, were those of the Romans, who now filled the city.

From the time of the Babylonian captivity, idolatry had been held as an abomination by the Jews. This national aversion was manifested even against the images of the Roman gods and emperors, which the Roman armies carried in their standards. We see this, in an earlier time of peace, when Pilate, and afterward Vitellius, at the request of some eminent Jews, avoided marching their forces through Judea because of this very reason. The desolating disposition that now governed the Roman army, the history of the Jewish war, and especially the final demolition of the holy city present an awful and prime example. Jerusalem was not merely captured, but its celebrated Temple was laid in ruins.

[**Author's note:** By comparing Matthew 24:15–16 with Luke 21:20, we can understand that the abomination that caused the desolation of Jerusalem was the Roman soldiers that lay siege to the city. Fortunately, Jesus told His followers that when they saw this, they should flee for the mountains. They did this because they understood what Jesus had said. Both Chrysostom and Augustine wrote agreeing that the abomination that caused the desolation was the Roman Army. Chrysostom (born in AD 347 at Antioch, capital of Syria) said, “For this it seems to me that the abomination of desolation means the army by which the holy city of Jerusalem was made desolate.”²²

Saint Augustine (born in AD 354 in North Africa) said, Luke, to show that the same abomination spoken of by Daniel will take place when Jerusalem is captured, recalls these words of the Lord in the same context: When you shall see Jerusalem compassed about with an army, then you know that the desolation thereof is at hand (xxi. 20).²³]

Lest, however, the army of Titus should not be sufficiently designated by this expression, our Lord adds, “*Wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together*” (Matt. 24:28 ASV). The Jewish state, indeed, at this time, was fitly compared to a carcass. The scepter of Judah—its civil and political authority, the life of its religion, and the glory of its Temple—were departed. It was, in short, morally and judicially dead. The eagle whose ruling instinct is rapine and murder, fitly represented the fierce and sanguinary temper of the Romans, and perhaps, it might be intended to refer also to the principal image on their ensigns, which, however obnoxious to the Jews, were

²² Quoted in Bray, *Matthew 24 Fulfilled*, 54.

²³ Ibid.

at length planted in the midst of the holy city and finally on the Temple itself.

[**Authors note:** In other words, the emblem of the eagle was upon the Roman shields and banners; also, Jerusalem was pictured as a dead carcass. As the commentator Barnes wrote:

The words in this verse are proverbial. Vultures and eagles easily ascertain where dead bodies are, and hasten to devour them. So with the Roman army. Jerusalem is like a dead and putrid corpse. Its life is gone, and it is ready to be devoured. The Roman armies will find it out, as the vultures do a dead carcass, and will come around it to devour it.²⁴]

The day on which Titus encompassed Jerusalem was the feast of the Passover, and it is worth noting that this was the anniversary of that memorable period in which the Jews crucified their Messiah! At this season, multitudes came up from all the surrounding country, and from distant parts, to keep the festival. How suitable and how kind, then, was the prophetic admonition of our Lord when he said, *“Let not them that are in the countries enter into Jerusalem”* (Luke 21:21).

[**Author’s note:** George Peter Holford’s book does not address Matthew 24:15–18, 20:

Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let no one on the housetop go down to take anything out of the house. Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak. Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath.

²⁴ Barnes, Matthew 24.

I am not sure why he skipped this section, but I will cover it briefly. Here, Jesus was giving very practical advice to His followers about how to stay alive during the AD 70 destruction. We can tell from this passage that Jesus was speaking of a local destruction (flee Judea) and a historical setting (not on a Sabbath). The natural tendency, upon seeing an approaching army, would have been to flee *into* Jerusalem for safety. Jesus told them to fight their natural instinct and flee the city.

Because of Jesus' command to flee, His followers were protected. In fact, as George Peter Holford said six paragraphs previously, "...history does not record that even one Christian perished in the siege of Jerusalem." Other highly respected commentators confirm this:

Furthermore, the members of the Jerusalem church, by means of an oracle given by revelation to acceptable persons there, were ordered to leave the City before the war began and settle in a town in Perea called Pella. To Pella those who believed in Christ migrated from Jerusalem; and as if holy men had utterly abandoned the royal metropolis of the Jews and the entire Jewish land, the judgment of God at last overtook them for their abominable crimes against Christ and His apostles, completely blotting out that wicked generation from among men.

— Eusebius²⁵

It is said that *there is reason to believe that not one Christian perished in the destruction of that city*, God having in various ways secured their escape, so that they fled to Pella, where they dwelt when the city was destroyed.

²⁵ Eusebius, 82.

—Albert Barnes²⁶

...it is remarked by several interpreters, and which Josephus takes notice of with surprise, that Cestius Gallus having advanced with his army to Jerusalem, and besieged it, on a sudden without any cause, raised the siege, and withdrew his army, when the city might have been easily taken; by which means a signal was made, and an opportunity given to the Christians, to make their escape: which they accordingly did, and went over to Jordan, as Eusebius says, to a place called Pella; so that when Titus came a few months after, *there was not a Christian in the city*...

—John Gill²⁷

I find this historical fact alone to be incredible proof that the first century believers knew that Jesus was speaking to them about AD 70.

Even the translator of Josephus' works noted:

There may another very important, and very providential, reason be here assigned for this strange and foolish retreat of Cestius; which, if Josephus had been now Christian, he might probably have taken notice of also; and that is, the affording the Jewish Christians in the city an opportunity to calling to mind the prediction and caution given them by Christ about thirty-three years and half before, that “when they should see the abomination of desolation” [the idolatrous Roman armies, with the images of their idols in their ensigns, ready to lay Jerusalem desolate] “stand where it ought not”; or, “in the holy place”;

²⁶ Barnes, Matthew 24.

²⁷ Gill, Matthew 24.

or, “when they should see Jerusalem encompassed with armies,” they should then “flee to the mountains.” By complying with which those Jewish Christians fled to the mountains of Perea, and escaped this destruction... Nor was there, perhaps, any one instance of a more unpolitic, but more providential conduct than this retreat of Cestius, visible during this whole siege of Jerusalem; which yet was providentially such a “Great Tribulation, as had not been from the beginning of the world to that time; no, nor ever should be.”^{28]}

[Like Lightning (Matt. 24:27)]

Nevertheless, the city was at this time crowded with Jewish strangers and foreigners from all parts so that the whole nation may be considered as having been shut up in one prison prior to the execution of the Divine vengeance. According to Josephus, this event took place suddenly, thus fulfilling the predictions of our Lord that these calamities should come like the swift-darting lightning “*that cometh out of the east and shineth even unto the West,*” and “*as a snare on all of them (the Jews) who dwelt upon the face of the whole earth*” (Matt. 24:27; Luke 21:35). Also justifying his friendly direction that those who fled from the place should use the utmost possible speed.

[Woe to the Pregnant (Matt. 24:19)]

On the appearance of the Roman army, the factious Jews united and, rushing furiously out of the city, repulsed the tenth legion, which was with difficulty preserved. This event caused a short suspension of hostilities and, by

²⁸ William Whiston, note b in his translation of Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, 204.

opening the gates, gave an opportunity to those who were so disposed to make their escape. Before this they could not have attempted an escape without interruption because it would have caused suspicion that they wished to join the Romans.

This success inspired the Jews with confidence, and they resolved to defend their city to the very uttermost, but it did not prevent the renewal of their civil broils. The faction under Eleazer had dispersed and arranged themselves under the two other leaders, **John Levi** and Simon, and afterward ensued a scene of the most dreadful contention, plunder, and conflagration. The middle space of the city was burnt, and the wretched inhabitants were made the prize of the contending parties.

The Romans, at length, gained possession of two of the three walls that defended the city, and fear once more united the factions. This pause to their fury had, however, scarcely begun when famine made its ghastly appearance in the Jewish army. It had for some time been silently approaching, and many of the peaceful and the poor had already perished for want of necessaries. With this new calamity, strange to relate, the madness of the factions again returned, and the city presented a new picture of wretchedness. Impelled by the cravings of hunger, they snatched food out of each other's hands, and many devoured grain unprepared.

Tortures were inflicted for the discovery of a handful of meal; women forced food from their husbands and children from their fathers and even mothers from their infants; while sucking children were wasting away in their arms, they scrupled not to take away the vital drops that sustained them! So accurately did our Lord pronounce a woe on *"them that should give suck in those days"* (Matt. 24:19). This dreadful scourge at length drove multitudes of the Jews out of the city into the enemy's camp, where the

Romans crucified them in such numbers that, as Josephus relates, space was wanted for the crosses, and crosses for the captives. When it was discovered that some of them had swallowed gold, the Arabs and Syrians, who were incorporated into the Roman army, impelled by avarice, with unexampled cruelty, ripped open two thousand of the deserters in one night.

Titus, touched by these calamities, in person entreated the Jews to surrender, but they answered him with reviling. Exasperated by their obstinacy and insolence, he resolved to surround the city by a circumvallation (a trench of 39 furlongs [4.87 miles] in circuit and strengthened with 13 towers), which with astonishing activity was created by the soldiers in three days. Thus was fulfilled another of our Lord's predictions, for he had said, while addressing this devoted city, "*Thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round about, and keep thee in on every side*" (Luke 19:43).

As no supplies whatever could now enter the walls, the famine rapidly extended itself and, increasing in horror, devoured whole families. The tops of houses and the recesses of the city were covered with the carcasses of women, children, and aged men. The young men appeared like specters in the places of public resort and fell down lifeless in the streets. The dead were too numerous to be interred, and many died while burying others. The public calamity was too great for lamentation. Silence and, as it were, a black and deadly night overspread the city.

But even such a scene could not awe the robbers; they spoiled the tombs and stripped the dead of their grave clothes with an unfeeling and wild laughter. They tried the edges of their swords on the carcasses and even on some that were yet breathing. Simon Goras chose this melancholy and awful period to manifest the deep malignity and cruelty of his nature in the execution of the

Priest, Matthias, and his three sons, whom he caused to be condemned as favorers of the Romans. The father, in consideration of his having opened the city gates to Simon, begged that he might be executed previously to his children, but the unfeeling tyrant gave orders that he should be dispatched in the last place, and in his expiring moments, Simon insultingly asked him whether the Romans could then relieve him.

While the city was in this dismal situation, a Jew named Mannæus fled to Titus and informed him that from the beginning of the siege (the 14th of April) to the first of July following, 115,880 dead bodies had been carried through one gate only, which he had guarded. This man had been appointed to pay the public allowance for carrying the bodies out, and was, therefore, obliged to register them. Soon after, several respectable individuals deserted to the Romans and assured Titus that the whole number of the poor who had been cast out at the different gates was not less than 600,000. The report of these calamities excited pity in the Romans and in a particular manner affected Titus, who, while surveying the immense number of dead bodies that were piled raised his hands toward Heaven and, appealing to the Almighty, solemnly protested that he had not been the cause of these deplorable calamities. Indeed, the Jews, by their unexampled wickedness, rebellion, and obstinacy, had brought it down upon their own heads.

After this, Josephus, in the name of Titus, earnestly exhorted **John Levi** and his adherents to surrender, but the insolent rebel returned nothing but reproaches and imprecations, declaring his firm persuasion that Jerusalem, as it was God's own city, could never be taken. Thus he literally fulfilled the declaration of Micah that the Jews, in their extremity, notwithstanding their crimes, would presumptuously "*lean upon the Lord, and say, 'Is not the*

Lord among us? None evil can come upon us” (Micah 3:11).

Meanwhile the horrors of famine grew still more melancholy and afflictive. The Jews, for want of food, were at length compelled to eat their belts, their sandals, the skins of their shields, dried grass, and even the manure of oxen. In the depth of this horrible extremity, a Jewess of noble family, urged by the intolerable cravings of hunger, slew her infant child and prepared him for a meal. She had actually eaten one half thereof when the soldiers, allured by the smell of food, threatened her with instant death if she refused to reveal it. Intimidated by this menace, she immediately produced the remains of her son, which petrified them with horror. At the recital of this melancholy and affecting occurrence, the whole city stood aghast and poured forth their congratulations on those whom death had hurried away from such heartrending scenes.

[**Author’s note:** This horrific story is an exact fulfillment of the curses spoken to Israel. *“You shall eat the fruit of your own body, the flesh of your sons and your daughters whom the LORD your God has given you, in the siege and desperate straits in which your enemy shall distress you” (Deut. 28:53 NKJV).*]

Indeed, humanity at once shudders and sickens at the narration. Nor can any one of the least sensibilities reflect upon the pitiable condition to which the female inhabitants of Jerusalem must have been reduced without experiencing the tenderest emotions of sympathy. Nor can he refrain from tears while he reads our Savior’s pathetic address to the women who *“bewailed him”* as he was led to Calvary, wherein he evidently refers to these very calamities: *“Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but for yourselves and for your children; for, behold, the days are coming in which they shall say, ‘Blessed are the barren,*

and the wombs that never bare, and the breasts that never gave suck" (Luke 23:29).

[**Author's note:** Jesus' death was horrible, but He wept for the women and children of Jerusalem. In comparison, He was saying that their deaths would be far worse!]

The above melancholy fact was also literally foretold by Moses: "*The tender and delicate women among barbarian, who would not venture to set the sole of her foot upon the ground for delicateness and tenderness, her eye shall be evil....toward her young one....which she shall bear,*" and "*eat for want of all things, secretly, in the siege and straitness wherewith thine enemy shall distress thee in thy gates*" (Deut. 28:56–57).

And it is important to note—as a circumstance that very greatly enhances the importance of this prophecy—that the history of the world does not record a parallel instance of unnatural barbarity ever occurring during the siege of any other place in any other age or nation whatsoever. Indeed, Josephus himself declared that, if there had not been many credible witnesses of the fact, he would not have recorded it, "because," as he remarks, "*such a shocking violation of nature never having been perpetuated by any Greek or barbarian,*" the insertion of it might have diminished the credibility of his history.

While famine continued to spread its destructive rage through the city, the Romans, after many ineffectual attempts, at length succeeded in demolishing part of the inner wall, possessed themselves of the great tower of Antonia, and advanced toward the Temple, which Titus, in a council of war, had determined to preserve as an ornament to the empire and as a monument of his success. But the Almighty had determined otherwise. Now, in the predetermination of time that fateful day finally arrived. The Ninth of Av, emphatically called "*a day of vengeance*"

(Luke 21:21), the same exact day on which the Temple had formerly been destroyed by the king of Babylon in 586 BC!

[**Author's note:** In Luke 4:18–19, Jesus read a prophecy from Isaiah 61:1–2:

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God....

This is the passage as it appears in Isaiah, but when Jesus quoted it, He did not finish the passage. Jesus stopped mid-sentence. The portion in bold, Jesus excluded. Yet in Luke 21:21, Jesus declared *the day of vengeance*. Jesus started His ministry to the Jews in the favor of the Lord, but then after three and a half years, Jesus finished the prophecy by declaring that *the day of vengeance* was now coming.]

A Roman soldier, urged, as he declared, by a divine impulse, regardless of the command of Titus, climbed on the shoulders of another and threw a flaming brand into the golden window of the Temple, which instantly set the building on fire. The Jews, anxious above all things to save that sacred edifice in which they superstitiously trusted for security, with a dreadful outcry, rushed in to extinguish the flames. Titus also, hoping to extinguish the conflagration, hastened to the spot in his chariot, attended by his principal officers and legions. But in vain he waved his hand and raised his voice, commanding his soldiers to extinguish the fire; so great was the uproar and confusion that no attention was paid even to him. The Romans, willfully deaf, instead of extinguishing the flames spread them wider and wider.

Compelled by the fiercest impulses of rancor and revenge against the Jews, they rushed furiously upon them, slaying some with the sword, trampling others under their feet, or crushing them to death against the walls. Many, falling amongst the smoking ruins of the porches and galleries, were suffocated. The unarmed poor and even sick people were slaughtered without mercy. Of these unhappy people, numbers were left weltering in their gore. Multitudes of the dead and dying were heaped round about the altar, to which they had formerly fled for protection, while the steps that led from it into the outer court were literally deluged with their blood.

Finding it impossible to restrain the rashness and cruelty of his soldiers, the commander-in-chief proceeded, with some of his superior officers, to take a survey of those parts of the edifice that were still uninjured by the conflagration. It had not, at that time, reached the inner Temple, which Titus entered and viewed with silent admiration. Struck with the magnificence of its architecture and the beauty of its decorations, which even surpassed the report of fame concerning them, and perceiving that the sanctuary had not yet caught fire, he renewed his efforts to stop the progress of the flames. He condescended even to entreat his soldiers to exert all their strength and activity for this purpose, and he appointed a centurion of the guards to punish them if they again disregarded him. But all was in vain.

The delirious rage of the soldiery knew no bounds. Eager for plunder and for slaughter, they alike ignored the solicitations and menaces of their general. Even while he was thus intent upon the preservation of the sanctuary, one of the soldiers was actually active in setting fire to the doorposts, which caused the conflagration to become general. Titus and his officers were now compelled to retire, and none remained to check the fury of the soldiers

or the flames. The Romans, exasperated to the highest pitch against the Jews, seized every person whom they could find and, without the least regard to sex, age, or quality, first plundered and then slew them. The old and the young, the common people and the priests, those who surrendered and those who resisted, were equally involved in this horrible and indiscriminate carnage.

Meanwhile, the Temple continued burning, until at length, vast as was its size, the flames completely enveloped the whole building. Thus the extent of the fire impressed the distant spectator with an idea that the whole city was now on fire. The tumult and disorder that ensued upon this event, it is impossible (says Josephus) for language to describe. The Roman legions made the most horrid outcries; the rebels, finding themselves exposed to the fury of both fire and sword, screamed dreadfully; while the unhappy people, who were pent up between the enemy and the flames, deplored their situation in the most pitiable complaints. Those on the hill and those in the city seemed mutually to return the groans of each other. Such as were expiring through famine were revived by this hideous scene and seemed to acquire new spirits to deplore their misfortunes. The lamentations from the city were re-echoed from the adjacent mountains and places beyond Jordan. The flames which enveloped the Temple were so violent and impetuous that the lofty hill on which it stood appeared, even from its deep foundations, as one large body of fire.

[**Authors note:** The incineration of Jerusalem is the blazing furnace referenced in Matthew 13:42 about the wheat and tares.]

The blood of the sufferers flowed in proportion to the rage of this destructive element, and the number of the slain exceeded all calculation. The ground could not be seen for the dead bodies, over which the Romans trampled in

pursuit of the fugitives, while the crackling noise of the devouring flames, mingled with the clamor of arms, the groans of the dying, and the shrieks of despair, increased the tremendous horror of a scene to which the pages of history can furnish no parallel.

Among the tragic events that at this time occurred, the following is more particularly deserving of notice: A false prophet, pretending to be a divine commission, said that if the people would flee to the Temple, they should behold signs of their speedy deliverance. Accordingly, about six thousand people, chiefly women and children, assembled in a gallery that was yet standing, on the outside of the building. While they waited in anxious expectation of the promised miracle, the Romans, with the most wanton barbarity, set fire to the gallery. Multitudes, rendered frantic by their horrible situation, threw themselves from the gallery onto the ruins below and were killed by the fall. Meanwhile, awful to relate, the rest, without a single exception, perished in the flames. So necessary was our Lord's second premonition not to give credit to "*false prophets*" who should pretend "*to show great signs and wonders.*"

The Temple now presented little more than a heap of ruins. The Roman army, as in triumph on the event, came and raised their ensigns against a fragment of the eastern gate, and with sacrifices of thanksgiving, they proclaimed the imperial majesty of Titus with every possible demonstration of joy.

Thus ended the glory and existence of the sacred and venerable Temple, which from its stupendous size, its massy solidity, and its astonishing strength, seemed formed to resist the most violent operations of human force and to stand, like the pyramids, amid the shocks of successive ages until the final dissolution of the globe.

For five days after the destruction of the Temple, the priests who had escaped sat, pining with hunger, on the top of one of its broken walls; at length they came down and humbly asked the pardon of Titus, which, however, he refused to grant them, saying that, "*as the Temple, for the sake of which he would have spared them, was destroyed, it was but fit that its priests should perish also*"—whereupon he commanded that they should be put to death.

The leaders of the factions, who were now pressed on all sides, begged a conference with Titus, who offered to spare their lives if they would lay down their arms. To this reasonable condition, however, they refused to comply. In response, Titus, exasperated by their obstinacy, resolved that he would hereafter grant no pardon to the insurgents and ordered a proclamation to be made to this effect. The Romans had now full license to ravage and destroy. Early the following morning, they set fire to the castle, the register office, the council chamber, and the palace of the queen Helena, and then they spread themselves throughout the city, slaughtering wherever they came and burning the dead bodies that were scattered over every street and on the floors of almost every house.

In the royal palace, where immense treasures were deposited, the seditious Jews murdered 8,400 of their own people and afterward plundered their property. Prodigious numbers of deserters, also, who had escaped from the tyrants and fled into the enemy's camp, were slain.

The soldiers, however, at length, weary of killing and satiated with the blood that they had spilt, laid down their swords and sought to gratify avarice. For this purpose, they took the Jews, together with their wives and families, and publicly sold them, like cattle in a market. A multitude was exposed to sale, while the purchasers were few in number. And now were fulfilled the words of Moses: "*And ye shall*

be sold for bond-men and bond-women, and no man shall buy you” (Deut. 28:68).

The Romans, having become masters of the lower city, set it on fire. The Jews now fled to the higher, from whence, their pride and insolence yet unabated, they continued to exasperate their enemies and even appeared to view the burning of the town below them with tokens of pleasure. In a short time, however, the walls of the higher city were demolished by the Roman catapults, and the Jews, lately so haughty and presumptuous, were now trembling and panic-struck, and they fell on their faces and deplored their own arrogance. Those who were in the towers, which were deemed impregnable to human force, were beyond measure afraid, and they strangely forsook the towers and sought refuge in caverns and subterraneous passages. In these dismal retreats, no less than 2,000 dead bodies were afterward found. Thus, as our Lord had predicted, did these miserable creatures, in effect, say *“to the mountains, ‘Fall on us;’ and to the rocks, ‘Cover us’”* (Luke 23:20).

Since the walls of the city were now completely in the possession of the Romans, they hoisted their colors upon the towers and burst forth into the most triumphant acclamations. After this, all annoyance from the Jews being at an end, the soldiers gave an unbridled license to their fury against the inhabitants. They first plundered and then set fire to the houses. They ranged through the streets with drawn swords in their hands, murdering every Jew whom they met, without distinction, till at length, the bodies of the dead choked up all the alleys and narrow passes while their blood literally flowed down the channels of the city in streams. As it drew toward evening, the soldiers exchanged the sword for the torch, and amidst the darkness of this awful night, they set fire to the remaining divisions of the place.

The vial of divine wrath, which had been so long pouring out upon this devoted city, was now emptying, and Jerusalem, once "*a praise in all the earth*" and the subject of a thousand prophecies, which was deprived of the staff of life, wrapped in flames, and bleeding on every side, finally sunk into utter ruin and desolation. (This memorable siege ended on the 8th day of September, AD 70. Its duration was nearly five months, the Romans having invested the city on the 14th day of the preceding April.)

Before their final demolition, however, Titus took a survey of the city and its fortifications, and while contemplating their impregnable strength; he could not help ascribing his success to the Almighty himself. Titus exclaimed, "*Had not God himself aided our operations, and driven the Jews from their fortresses, it would have been absolutely impossible to have taken them; for what could men, and the force of catapults, have done against such towers as these?*" After this he commanded that the city should be razed to its foundations, excepting only the three lofty towers Hippocos, Phasael, and Mariamne, which he allowed to remain as evidences of its strength and as trophies of his victory. There was left standing, also, a small part of the western wall, as a rampart for a garrison, to keep the surrounding country in subjection.

Titus now gave orders that only those Jews who resisted should be slain, but the soldiers, equally void of pity and remorse, slew even the sick and the aged. The robbers and seditious were all punished with death. The tallest and most beautiful youths, together with several of the Jewish nobles, were reserved by Titus to grace his triumphal entry into Rome. After this selection, all above the age of seventeen were sent in chains into Egypt to be employed there as slaves or distributed throughout the empire to be sacrificed as gladiators in the amphitheaters; those who were under this age were exposed to sale.

During the time that these things were transacted, 11,000 Jews, guarded by one of the generals, named Fronto, were literally starved to death. This melancholy occurrence happened partly through the scarcity of provisions and partly through their own obstinacy and the negligence of the Romans.

Of the Jews destroyed during the siege, Josephus reckons not less than one million and one hundred thousand, to which must be added above 237,000 who perished in other places and innumerable multitudes who were swept away by famine and pestilence and of which no calculation could be made. Not less than 2,000 laid violent hands upon themselves. Of the captives, the whole was about 97,000. Of the two great leaders of the Jews, who had both been made prisoners, **John Levi** was doomed to a dungeon for life, while Simon, together with **John Levi**, in triumph at Rome was scourged, and Simon was put to death as a malefactor.

[**Authors note:** *"If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened"* (Matt. 24:22). We can see from the number above that if the slaughter had not been cut short, the Jews could have been completely annihilated. Also if the killing had not ceased in the city, then the Romans would have likely proceeded to nearby Mount Pella to attack the Christians that had fled the city.]

In executing the command of Titus regarding the demolition of Jerusalem, the Roman soldiers not only threw down the buildings, but even dug up their foundations. They so completely leveled the whole circuit of the city that a stranger would scarcely have known that it had ever been inhabited by human beings. Thus was this great city, which only five months before had been crowded with nearly two million people, who gloried in its impregnable strength, entirely depopulated and leveled to the ground.

Thus also was our Lord's prediction that her enemies should "*lay her even with the ground,*" and "*should not leave in her one stone upon another*" (Luke 19:44) most strikingly and fully accomplished!

This fact is confirmed by the earliest church historian, Eusebius, who asserts that he himself saw the city lying in ruins, and Josephus introduces Eleazer as exclaiming, "Where is our great city, which, it was believed, God inhabited? It is altogether rooted and torn up from its foundations, and the only monument of it that remains, is the camp of its destroyers pitched amidst its relics!"

Concerning the Temple, our Lord foretold particularly that, notwithstanding their wonderful dimensions, there should "*not be left one stone upon another that should not be thrown down*" (Matt. 24:2). Accordingly, it is recorded, in the Talmud and by Maimonides that Terentius Rufus, captain of the army of Titus, absolutely ploughed up the foundations of the Temple with a ploughshare. Now, also, was literally fulfilled that prophecy of Micah—"*Therefore shall Zion, for your sakes (i. e. for your wickedness,) be ploughed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the Lord's house as the high places of the forest*" (Micah 3:12).

[**Authors note:** "Today's Western Wall (also called the Wailing Wall) in Jerusalem was never a part of the Temple that existed in Jesus' day. It was a part of the parapet (protective fort-like wall) that King Herod had built around the Temple."²⁹]

Thus awfully complete and beyond example were the calamities, which befell the Jewish nation and especially the city of Jerusalem. With such accuracy did our Lord declare that there should "*be great tribulation, such as was*

²⁹ Eberle and Trench, 15.

not since the beginning of the world, no, nor ever shall be!” (Matt. 24:21).

[Authors note: There is no such thing as two fulfillments to a given prophecy. That idea, although popular, is not biblical or sensible. If a prophecy is given, it has one fulfillment. To say it has two fulfillments just means that one interpretation was incorrect. Not only is double fulfillment not sensible, but also Jesus went out of His way to declare that Matthew 24 would only be fulfilled once (see Matt. 24:21). This removes the possibility of double fulfillment.

Jesus pointed out that this tribulation would be the worst that had ever happened and the worst that ever would happen, implying that time would continue after this event, not that this event would be at the end of time. Many have taught that this prophecy of Jesus would happen at the end of time, but that is inconsistent with Jesus saying that it this event would occur in the middle of the timeline, not at the end of human history!

When it comes to interpreting “the worst thing to ever happen,” we have two options—literal and hyperbolic. According to a literal interpretation, the destruction of the Jewish state, the Temple, the priesthood, and the genealogical records (ensuring that the priesthood system can *never* be restored), along with the the death of 1.1 million Jews, is easily the worst event in the history of Israel.

A hyperbolic interpretation is also possible, as suggested by DeMar:

One reason offered for the belief that the great tribulation is still a future event is the seemingly unqualified statement in Matthew 24:21 concerning a “great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until

now, nor ever shall.” This language is nearly identical to Ezekiel 5:9: “And because of all your abominations, I will do among you what I have not done, and the like of which I will never do again.” Ezekiel 5:9 refers to the destruction of Jerusalem in the sixth century B.C. by the Babylonians, and yet Bible commentators who hold out for a yet future great tribulation state that “never again would God execute a judgment like this.” But God did execute a greater judgment in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, and dispensationalists claim that there will be yet an even greater tribulation sometime in the near future. The language of Ezekiel 5:9 and Matthew 24:21 is obviously proverbial and hyperbolic.^{30]}

Such was the prediction, and the language in which Josephus declares its fulfillment is an exact counterpart to it: “If the misfortunes,” says he, “of all nations, from the beginning of the world, were compared with those which befell the Jews, they would appear far less in comparison.” And again he says, “No other city ever suffered such things, as no other generation, from the beginning of the world, was ever more fruitful in wickedness.” These were, indeed, “*the days of vengeance*,” that all things that are written (especially by Moses, Joel, and Daniel) might be fulfilled (Luke 21:22).

Nor were the calamities of this ill-fated nation even now ended. There were still other places to subdue, and our Lord had thus predicted, “*wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together*” (Matt. 24:28). After the destruction of Jerusalem, 1,700 Jews who surrendered at Macherus were slain, and of fugitives, not less than 3,000 were killed in the woods of Jarden. Titus, having

³⁰ DeMar, 120.

marched his army to Caesarea, there with great splendor celebrated the birthday of his brother, Domitian. And according to the barbarous manner of those times, he punished many Jews in honor of it. The number who were burned and who fell by fighting with wild beasts and in mutual combats exceeded 2,500.

At the siege of Massada, Eleazer, the Jewish commander, instigated the garrison to burn their stores and to destroy first the women and children and then themselves. Dreadful as it is to relate, this horrid design was executed. They were in number 960. Ten were chosen to perform the bloody work: The rest sat on the ground and, embracing their wives and children, stretched out their necks to the sword. One was afterward appointed to destroy the remaining nine and then himself. The survivor, when he had looked round to see that all were slain, set fire to the place and plugged his sword into his own bosom. Nevertheless, two women and five children successfully concealed themselves and witnessed the whole transaction. When the Romans advanced to the attack in the morning, one of the women gave them a distinct account of this melancholy affair and struck them with amazement at the contempt of death that had been displayed by the Jews.

After this event, if we exclude the transitory insurrection of the Sicarii under Jonathan, all opposition on the part of the Jews everywhere ceased. It was the submission of impotence and despair. The peace that ensued was the effect of the direst necessity. The rich territory of Judea was converted into a desolate waste. Everywhere ruin and desolation presented itself to the solitary passenger, and a melancholy and death-like silence reigned over the whole region. The mournful and desolate condition of Judea, at this time, is exactly described by the prophet Isaiah, in the following of his prophecies: *"The cities were without inhabitant, and the houses without a*

man, and the land was utterly desolate, and the LORD had removed men far away, and there was a great forsaking in the midst of the land” (Isa. 6:11–12).

The catastrophe that has now been reviewed is one of the most extraordinary that has happened since the foundation of the world. As it has pleased the Almighty to make it the subject of a very large proportion of the prophecies, both of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, so he has ordained that the particular events which accomplished them should be recorded with very remarkable precision and by a man most singularly preserved, qualified, and circumstanced for this purpose.

But with respect to this latter point, he shall speak for himself: “At first,” says Josephus, “I fought against the Romans, but was afterwards forced to be present in the Roman camp. At the time I surrendered, Vespasian and Titus kept me in bonds, but obliged me to attend them continually. Afterwards I was set at liberty, and accompanied Titus when he came from Alexandria to the siege of Jerusalem. During this time nothing was done that escaped my knowledge. What happened in the Roman camp I saw, and wrote down carefully. As to the information the deserters brought out of the city, I was the only man that understood it. Afterwards I got leisure at Rome; and when all my materials were prepared, I procured the help of one to assist me in writing Greek. Thus I composed the history of those transactions, and I appealed both to Titus and Vespasian for the truth of it; to which also Julius Archelaus, Herod, and King Agrippa, bore their testimony.”

All remark here is needless, but it should not be forgotten that Josephus was a Jew, obstinately attached to his religion, and that, although he has circumstantially related every remarkable event of that period, he seems studiously to have avoided such as had any reference to

Jesus Christ, whose history he sums up in about twelve written lines. No one, therefore, can reasonably entertain a suspicion that the service he has rendered to Christianity, by his narrative of the transactions of the Jewish war, was at all the effect of design. The fidelity of Josephus as an historian is, indeed, universally admitted, and Scaliger even affirms that, not only in the affairs of the Jews, but in those of foreign nations also, he deserves more credit than all the Greek and Roman writers put together.

Nor is the peculiar character of Titus, the chief commander in this war, unworthy of our particular regard. Vespasian, his father, had risen out of obscurity and was elected emperor, contrary to his avowed inclination, about the commencement of the conflict. Thus the chief command devolved upon Titus, the most unlikely man throughout the Roman armies to become a scourge to Jerusalem. He was eminently distinguished for his great tenderness and humanity, which he displayed in a variety of instances during the siege. He repeatedly made calm offers to the Jews and deeply lamented that they rejected them in their madness. In short, he did everything that a military commander could do to spare them and to preserve their city and Temple, but without effect. Thus was the will of God accomplished by Titus, although contrary to the wish of Titus, and God's predicted interposition to punish his rebellious and apostate people.

The Remainder of Matthew 24

For whatever reason, George Peter Holford's booklet does not address the rest of Matthew 24 (verses 29–51). Let's look at these verses briefly.

Signs in the Sky

*Immediately after the distress of those days:
“the sun will be darkened, and the moon*

will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken” (Matthew 24:29).

To the first century Jewish listeners, “*signs in the sky*” was a figure of speech from the Old Testament, apocalyptic language referring to the destruction of a government or city. Scholar John Forster confirms this:

In ancient Hieroglyphic writings the sun, moon, and stars represented empires and states, with their sovereigns and nobility. The eclipse of these luminaries was said to denote temporary national disasters, or an entire overthrow of any state. This is still an Eastern mode of writing, and there are some classical examples of it. The Prophets frequently employ it, so that their style seems to be a speaking hieroglyphic. Thus Isaiah describes the destruction of Babylon, and Ezekiel that of Egypt.³¹

Theologian Gary DeMar also illustrates this pattern of Hebrew imagery, starting in Genesis with the creation story and Joseph’s dream:

The first chapter of Genesis gives us a clue as to why the Bible compares the sun, moon, and stars to rulers and their kingdoms: The sun (“greater light”) and the moon (“lesser light”) are said to “govern the day” and “night” (Gen. 1:16). Can we find examples of the sun and moon being used as symbols of government? In a dream Joseph saw “the sun and moon and eleven stars... bowing down” to him (Gen. 37:9). The sun, moon, and stars represented Joseph’s father, mother, and brothers. Joseph, being only “seventeen years old”

³¹ Forster, 307.

(Gen. 37:2), was under the government of his father, mother, and older brothers. In reality, they ruled over Joseph. Upon hearing about Joseph's dream, Jacob asked him, "What is this dream that you have had? *Shall I and your mother and your brothers actually come to bow ourselves down before you to the ground?*" (Gen. 37:10). Joseph's father and brothers immediately understood the significance of the images in his dream. They were not looking for the sun, moon, and stars to bow down before Joseph.³²

Not surprisingly, the Old Testament has multiple examples of cities receiving prophecies of their destruction using terms related to heavenly bodies. To Egypt, Ezekiel prophesied:

When I snuff you out, I will cover the heavens and darken their stars; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon will not give its light. All the shining lights in the heavens I will darken over you; I will bring darkness over your land, declares the Sovereign LORD (Ezekiel 32:7–8).

Isaiah prophesied Edom's coming destruction using similar metaphors:

All the stars in the sky will be dissolved and the heavens rolled up like a scroll; all the starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shriveled figs from the fig tree. My sword has drunk its fill in the heavens; see, it descends in judgment on Edom, the people I have totally destroyed (Isaiah 34:4–5).

Both Isaiah and Amos foretold Babylon's destruction in heavenly terms:

³² DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, 145.

The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light (Isaiah 13:10).

“In that day,” declares the Sovereign LORD, “I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight (Amos 8:9).

Habakkuk 3, which is about Babylon coming to destroy Israel, also uses the same sort of imagery. Also, it is typical in biblical language to represent the people of Israel as stars (see Gen. 22:17; 26:4; Deut. 1:10). In these passages, we find overwhelming proof that celestial imagery—“signs in the sky”—often foretold the destruction of a city or nation. Thus, in Matthew 24:29, Jesus’ listeners would have known He was speaking in Old Testament symbolism about the destruction of Jerusalem, *not* the end of the world.

Coming on the Clouds

Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth [the tribes of the land] will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory (Matthew 24:30).

First, we must recognize that this passage does not refer to a global event. Where it says *earth*, the root word is *ge*, which means “land,” as in “the land of Israel.”³³ This passage does not use the word *kosmos*, which means “the whole planet earth.” That is why many translations use the phrase “*tribes of the land*” (inserted above) or, at the very least, include it in the footnotes.

Second, the phrase “*coming on clouds of heaven*,” was a common Old Testament symbol for God coming in

³³ Eberle and Trench, 60.

judgment upon ancient historical people and nations (see Ps. 18:7–15; 104:3; Isa. 19:1; Joel 2:1–2; Zeph. 1:4,15). The first century Jewish listeners would have understood this. I will discuss the “cloud comings” more in chapter 3. For now it is simply important to realize that when Jesus talked about the coming of the Son of Man, He was referring to a coming of judgment, not to His final return.

Third, the “*sign of the son of man in heaven*” is likely a reference to the sign we read about earlier from Josephus—the sword that hung in the sky for a year over Jerusalem before AD 70.

Gathering the Elect

And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other (Matthew 24:31).

Many have interpreted this to refer to the rapture, but as David Chilton explains, it actually refers to the influx of converts to Christianity:

Finally, Jesus announced, the result of Jerusalem’s destruction will be Christ’s sending forth of His “angels” to gather the elect. Isn’t this the rapture? No. The word *angels* simply means *messengers* (cf. James 2:25), regardless of whether their origin is heavenly or earthly; it is the *context* which determines whether these are heavenly creatures being spoken of. The word often means *preachers of the Gospel* (see Matthew 11:10; Luke 7:24; 9:52; Revelation 1-3). In context, there is every reason to assume that Jesus is speaking of the worldwide evangelism and conversion of the

nations, which will follow upon the destruction of Israel.³⁴

After the destruction of the Temple and the Jewish religious system, God began to gather people into His Kingdom from the four corners of the earth. *Victorious Eschatology* gives another great explanation of this verse:

As Jesus sat down on His throne, all authority was given to Him in heaven and earth. Everything changed the moment Jesus came into His kingdom. The blowing of a trumpet meant to the Jews that a royal decree was going out. And what was that decree? It was time to release angels of God to go and gather His people from every nation. At the same time, the disciples of Jesus were commissioned to go and preach the gospel, making disciples of every nation. No longer was the Jewish nation the only people allowed within a covenant relationship with God [this occurred in Acts 10]. Jesus had become the Good Shepherd who was gathering His sheep from across the world.³⁵

Further proof that this verse does not refer to the end of history is found just three verses later, where Jesus said, *"This generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened"* (Matt. 24:34). In other words, it referred to an event within the lifetime of many of His original hearers.

Many modern Christians automatically associate the word *rapture* with the word *gather*. But this is contrary to the context. The New Testament also uses *gathering* in reference to the unification of Jews and gentiles, which

³⁴ Chilton, *The Great Tribulation*, 15.

³⁵ Eberle and Trench, 61–62.

Jesus did by His Atonement (see John 11:51–52; Eph. 2:11–22). In New Testament language, *gathering* most commonly refers to evangelism, to the gathering of God’s people, both Jews and gentiles, into the Kingdom of His Son. Gary DeMar confirms this interpretation of *gathering* by showing how the imagery in this verse alludes to the evangelization of all peoples, not just the Jews:

These messengers in Matthew 24:31 call together God’s people “from the four winds,” a reference to the four corners of the earth (Zech. 2:6; 13:29), and from one end of the sky to the other. This is a reference to the entire horizon of the world (Psalm 22:27; Deut. 4:32; Matt. 28:18–20). We should not be pressed to interpret “four winds” in a scientific fashion. “Four winds” suggests a square world, as does “four corners of the earth” or “land of Israel” (Isa. 11:12; Ezek. 7:2; Rev. 7:1; 20:8). The Bible, speaking in theological terms, depicts the earth as a house. Heaven is described in a similar fashion (John 14:2). None of this language suggests that the earth is flat or a cube, something that a wooden literalism would demand. The Bible alludes to the earth’s circularity in Isaiah 40:22: “‘It is he that sits upon the circle of the earth’- ‘circle’ being the translation of the Hebrew *khug*, sphere.” By using this metaphor of the four winds, Jesus is telling us that the elect are gathered from everywhere, not limited to the land, or house (Matt. 15:24), of Israel (Matt. 8:11).³⁶

Clearly, when Jesus prophesied the gathering of His elect, He was not speaking of a rapture but of the spread of His Kingdom on earth, both prior to and following the destruction of Jerusalem.

³⁶ DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, 175.

The Fig Tree

Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door (Matthew 24:32–33).

This is a simple parable; in the same way that they can observe signs that summer is near, there would be obvious signs that the destruction of Jerusalem was upon them. The most obvious are the first eight signs. This verse contains no deeper meaning about Israel being restored as a nation. Because Adam covered himself with fig leaves, the fig is typically a negative symbol. Jesus also previously cursed the fig tree (see Mark 11:12–14). The negative fig would *never* be used to represent a restoration of Israel.

Also, the parallel passage in Luke shows that Jesus' point was not about the *type* of tree but that, in general, trees blossoming in the springtime are parabolic of how obvious these signs of the destruction would be. Notice the generalization of *trees*:

*Look at the fig tree **and all the trees**. When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the Kingdom of God is near (Luke 21:29–31).*

Surprisingly, John Walvoord, a dispensationalist, agrees that the fig tree does not represent Israel:

Actually, while the fig tree could be an apt illustration of Israel, it is not so used in the Bible. In Jeremiah 24:1–8, good and bad figs illustrate Israel in the captivity, and there is also mention of figs in 29:17. The reference to the fig tree in Judges 9:10–11 is obviously not Israel. Neither the reference in Matthew 21:18–20 nor that in Mark

11:12–14 with its interpretation in 11:20–26, gives any indication that it is referring to Israel, any more than the mountain referred to in the passage. Accordingly, while this interpretation is held by many, there is no clear scriptural warrant.

A better interpretation is that Christ was using a natural illustration. Because the fig tree brings forth new leaves late in the spring, the budding of the leaves is evidence that summer is near. In a similar way, when those living in the great tribulation see the signs predicted, this will know that the second coming of Christ is near. The signs in this passage, accordingly, are not the revival of Israel, but the great tribulation.³⁷

The fig tree was simply a parable for the obvious signs leading up to AD 70.

This Generation

Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away (Matthew 24:34–35).

To the Jewish people, a generation is forty years. We see this in the fact that a generation died in the wilderness during the forty-year journey (see Deut. 29:5). Therefore, Jesus was saying this prophecy would happen in the next forty years. Jesus said this in AD 30, and the entirety of His Matthew 24 prophecy was fulfilled in AD 70.

Some have tried to make the word *generation* into *race*, as in, “the Jewish race will not pass away until all these things have come to pass.” David Chilton responds to this idea excellently:

³⁷ Walvoord, *Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come*, 191–192.

Not one of these references [to the word *generation* in the New Testament] is speaking of the entire Jewish race over thousands of years; *all* use the word in its normal sense of *the sum total of those living at the same time*. It always refers to *contemporaries*. (In fact, those who say it means “race” tend to acknowledge this fact, but explain that the word suddenly *changes* its meaning when Jesus uses it in Matthew 24:34! We can smile at such transparent error, but we should also remember that this is very serious. We are dealing with the Word of the living God.)³⁸

Clearly, Jesus meant the Great Tribulation would happen to the generation of Jews alive in His day. Considering this, many people wonder, *How could God have poured out such judgment and wrath on that generation?* A survey of twelve statements God made about that evil generation is helpful:

1. ***This generation*** never responded correctly to God (see Matt. 11:16–19; Luke 7:31–34).
2. When ***this generation*** came to demand a sign, Jesus wouldn’t submit to their demands (see Mark 8:11–12).
3. ***This generation*** was called wicked, adulterous, sinful, unbelieving, perverse, warped, and crooked (see Luke 9:41; 11:29; Mark 8:38; 9:19; Matt. 17:17; Phil. 2:15).
4. The Queen of Sheba would have condemned ***this generation*** (see Matt. 12:42; Luke 11:31).
5. Even the men of Nineveh would have condemned ***this generation*** (see Matt. 12:41; Luke 11:32).
6. As Jonah was a sign of judgment to Nineveh, so Jesus was a sign of judgment upon ***this generation*** (see Luke 11:30).

³⁸ Chilton, *The Great Tribulation*, 25.

7. Jesus would suffer many things and be rejected by **this generation** (see Luke 17:25).
8. **This generation** would not pass away until all the curses of Matthew 23 would come upon **this generation** (see Matt 23:34,36).
9. **This generation** wouldn't pass away until the destruction of Jerusalem had occurred (see Mark 13:30; Luke 21:32; Matt. 24:34).
10. All the sin and bloodshed of the Old Testament would be charged against **this generation** (see Luke 11:49–51).
11. After Jesus swept Jerusalem clean spiritually, Jerusalem became seven times worse in that wicked **generation** leading up to the AD 70 destruction (see Matt. 12:43–45).
12. Peter pled with his audience to save themselves from the corruptness of **this generation** (see Acts 2:40).

In other words, these were dark days indeed—darker than we might imagine. This is why Jesus made a comparison between that generation and the generation alive during the days of Noah. The Bible tells us that, because of the evil of Noah's generation, God actually regretted making humanity (see Gen. 6:6). As Holford's account of AD 70 makes clear, the generation alive during the destruction of Jerusalem was deeply depraved.

No One Knows the Hour

In the context of Noah's generation, Jesus made this declaration about the coming destruction:

But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and

took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man (Matthew 24:36–39).

To the Jewish mind, Noah's flood was the clearest picture of utter destruction. In the days of the flood, Noah declared a coming destruction, yet people carried on with normal life and ignored his warnings. They ignored him right to the last moment, when they were then destroyed. So it was in AD 70, when Jesus in His *coming* destroyed Jerusalem like the flood.

In his book on the subject, Gary DeMar quotes the famous commentaries of John Gill, Adam Clarke, and John Lightfoot on Jesus' words in Matthew 24:36:

John Gill writes: "*But of that day and hour knoweth no man, &c.*] Which is to be understood, not of the second coming of Christ, the end of the world, and the last judgment; but of the coming of the son of man, to take vengeance on the Jews, and of their destruction; for the words manifestly regard the date of the several things going on before, which only can be applied to that catastrophe, and dreadful desolation."

Gill assumes that the previous context of the chapter governs the meaning of "that day." As was pointed out above, Matthew 24:29 is a familiar Old Testament description of the "passing away of heaven and earth," that is, the end of a social, religious, and political system.

Adam Clarke offers a similar interpretation: "Verse 36. *But of that day and hour*] [The Greek word] *Ora* is translated *season* by many eminent critics, and is used in this sense by both sacred and profane authors. As the *day* was not known, in which Jerusalem should be invested by the Romans, therefore our Lord advised his disciples

to pray that it might not be on a *Sabbath*; and as the *season* was not known, therefore they were to pray that it might not be in the *winter*; ver. 20. See on Mark xiii 32.”

John Lightfoot’s comments show that the only possible reference was to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70: “That the discourse is of the day of the destruction of Jerusalem is so evident, both by the disciples’ question, and by the whole thread of Christ’s discourse, that it is a wonder any should understand these words of the *day and hour* of the last judgment.”³⁹

The proof is clear. Jesus’ declaration that His prophecy in Matthew 24 would happen in that generation was literally fulfilled in AD 70, just forty years after He declared it.

One Taken, One Left

Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left (Matthew 24:40–41).

Here, Jesus was not speaking of a rapture escape but of the arbitrary way in which the Romans would seize upon and kill the Jews in AD 70—literally cutting one farmer in half in the field and leaving the other one standing.

Keep Watch

*Therefore **keep watch**, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be*

³⁹ DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, 193–194.

*broken into. So you also must **be ready**, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when **you do not expect him**.*

*Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, “**My master is staying away a long time,**” and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. The master of that servant will come on a day when he **does not expect him** and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 24:42–51).*

Verses 42–51 are a connected admonition to keep watch, be ready, and be expectant. It would have been tempting for the Christians, over the course of forty years of waiting, to become complacent and stop believing that Jesus was coming in judgment upon Jerusalem. In fact, Second Peter 3:4 says some people were mocking Jesus’ prophecy, saying, “*Where is this ‘coming’ he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.*” Here, *coming* is in quotations because it did not refer to Jesus’ final return but was the Hebrew figure of speech for the judgment of God upon a city.

The servant in the story thought the master (Jesus) was going to be gone a long time, but he was completely wrong and was caught by surprise. In the same way, many people between AD 30 and AD 70 thought Jesus’ coming in

judgment was a long way off, and they were caught by surprise.

In Summary

For many of you, this has probably been completely new information. If you need to confirm the accuracy of what you just read, it is a matter of public record. By reading the works of the historians—Josephus, Eusebius, and Tacitus—as well as looking up a few Greek root words in *Vine's Expository Dictionary*, you can confirm everything contained in this chapter.

Also, I recognize that what you just read was incredibly graphic and heart-wrenching. As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the first time I read Holford's work, I had tears streaming down my face while on an airplane. David Chilton summarized this period well:

Josephus has left us an eyewitness record of much of the horror of those years, and especially of the final days in Jerusalem. It was a time when "the day-time was spent in the shedding of blood, and the night in fear"; when it was "common to see cities filled with dead bodies"; when Jews panicked and began indiscriminately killing each other; when fathers tearfully slaughtered their entire families, in order to prevent them from receiving worse treatment from the Romans; when, in the midst of terrible famine, mothers killed, roasted, and ate their own children (cf. Deuteronomy 28:53); when the whole land "was all over filled with fire and blood"; when the lakes and seas turned red, dead bodies floating everywhere, littering the shores, bloating in the sun, rotting and splitting apart; when the Roman

soldiers captured people attempting to escape and then crucified them—at the rate of 500 per day.⁴⁰

Although the records of these events are graphic and horrifying to consider, they are important for us to understand as Christians. They provide the proof that the Great Tribulation as prophesied by Jesus happened in entirety in AD 70. No part of Matthew 24 remains to be fulfilled in our future.

Chapter Points

- In Matthew 24, Jesus prophesied the Great Tribulation, which happened in AD 70 during the destruction of Jerusalem.
- The events of AD 70 happened within the timeframe that Jesus gave—a generation, or forty years.
- Jesus gave eight signs that would precede the Great Tribulation, and all were fulfilled prior to AD 70.
- There is no future Great Tribulation. Jesus said that nothing so terrible had ever happened before or would ever happen again.

Discussion Questions

1. Did you know so many major church leaders throughout history believed Matthew 24 already happened at AD 70?
2. Have you ever heard of the events of AD 70? How did learning about AD 70 make you feel?

⁴⁰ Chilton, *The Great Tribulation*, 14–15.

3. Have you ever considered Matthew 24 as a fulfilled prophecy before? Why or why not?
4. What parts of this chapter were the most memorable or stunning? What did you find convincing and why? What parts are you still questioning and why?

Chapter 2

The Antichrist

In my life, I have watched the meteoric rise of credit cards, cell phones, and the Internet. I have heard the preachers, authors, and bombshelter builders tell me that modern technology is paving the way for the antichrist to rule the world with his “mark of the beast” like in no other age. From radio frequency chips implanted under the skin to national identification numbers, there are a lot of concerns in the air.

In fact, I have heard these concerns for a long, long time. For a few years leading up to Y2K, I listened to my local Calvary Chapel radio station every day. Many of my friend’s parents stocked their basements with food and other supplies in preparation for the “grid” going down. I always thought that the best currency to stock up on for the coming apocalypse would be toilet paper, but nobody took my theory seriously. Now, over a decade later, my friend’s parents still have 55-gallon drums of wheat in their basement, which are finally expiring.

The idea that society is heading toward complete corruption and a one-world leader has been around a long time, and many dictators have tried to make this a reality. Yet it begs the question, what does the Bible say about this so-called antichrist?

The idea of the antichrist, as it is commonly taught, comes primarily from a compilation of four different passages of Scripture. However, when we look at these four passages in context, we discover that the Bible does not actually prophesy a future *one-world ruler*.

Passage #1: 1 and 2 John

To begin, we must realize that the term *antichrist* does not appear in the Book of Revelation at all. A simple search of a *Strong's Concordance* will reveal that the term *antichrist* is only used in four passages in the Bible, three times in First John and once in Second John.

To understand the term *antichrist*, we must first understand the context of John's writings.¹ During the time of the first century Church, a cult system called Gnosticism developed. Gnostics taught that the spirit is good but the physical and emotional realms are evil; therefore, they believed Jesus could not have come to earth in an actual physical body.² Gnostics taught that Jesus came to earth only as an ethereal spirit being. This teaching is heretical because it negates the truth of Jesus shedding His human blood for the remission of sin. The Gnostics gained so many followers in the early Church (about a third of the first century Church) that John wrote his first epistle in response to their heresy. That is the context of his opening words in First John:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and

¹ "John is...writing shortly before the Roman attack on Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple, sometime in the 60s AD." Leithhart, 9.

² "There were three stages of Gnostic development. The pre-Christian drew its inspiration from Greek, Jewish and eastern sources. In the second stage, a still mainly heathen Gnosticism used Christian ideas to fill up gaps—Jesus, for example, appearing as the agent of man's redemption. The third stage presented Christianity modified by Gnosticism to make it acceptable to religiously-minded, intellectual pagans, and in this form was heretical and a real danger to orthodox Christian belief....This version of Gnosticism was a variety of Docetism (from the Greek *Dokeo* = I seem) which, arising from the Gnostic dislike of matter and suffering as associated with God, taught that Jesus's body was not a real one." Christie-Murray, 22, 25.

*testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we **have seen and heard**, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ (1 John 1:1–3).*

John was writing to prove, as an eyewitness, that Jesus was not an ethereal ghost but a real physical person. John was the disciple who had leaned his head upon Jesus' chest, and he knew Jesus was not merely a spirit. He even remarked in John 1:14, "*The Word **became flesh** and made his dwelling among us. **We have seen** his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*" John's writings were very focused on those who had fallen into the first century Gnostic thinking. And in both First and Second John, he called those who claimed Jesus didn't have a physical body *antichrist*:

*Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that **acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh** is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. **This is the spirit of the antichrist**, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world (1 John 4:1–3).*

Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist (2 John 1:7).

John clearly said any person who denies that Jesus came in the flesh, which is what the Gnostics of the first century were doing, is operating in the spirit of antichrist.

In other words, the antichrist isn't a person; it is a belief system, specifically, Gnosticism.

John further mentioned the antichrist spirit as something the early believers had already heard of:

*Dear children, this is the last hour; and **as you have heard** that antichrist is coming... (1 John 2:18 NASB).*

When understanding this verse, it is important to note that certain Bible translations have inserted a word that is not in the Greek—creating much confusion. In First John 2:18, these translations insert the word *the* before the word *antichrist*, making it a proper noun, which then requires them to capitalize the word *Antichrist*. This distorts John's original meaning. The early Church had heard that antichrist (false Gnostic teaching) was coming, but they had not heard that the Antichrist (a one-world ruler) was coming. The insertion of *the* and the capitalization of *Antichrist* was added 1500 years later by translators.

With that understanding, we can discern the true meaning of John's letter. John said, "*As you have heard that antichrist is coming....*" The important question is, when had the readers of John's letter heard this message of an impending antichrist? Considering that the term *antichrist* refers to Gnosticism (false teachers), it makes sense that John would be referencing what Jesus had warned in Matthew 24—the coming of false teachers. The Gnosticism that John addressed in First and Second John was the false teaching Jesus had predicted.

The fact that *antichrist* does not refer to an individual is further proved by the next part of the verse: "*...even now many antichrists have come...*" (1 John 2:18). In other words, many false teachings had already come: Gnosticism, the Nicolaitan heresy, and the Judiazers' heresy (see Rev. 2:6,9,15; 3:9). The use of *many* precludes the idea of a

single individual called the antichrist. John finishes this verse with, “*This is how we know it is the last hour*” (1 John 2:18). This again shows that John was referring to Jesus’ prediction in Matthew 24 that one sign of the coming destruction of Jerusalem would be false teachers. Thus, the appearance of Gnostic heresy was a sign that it was *the last hour* before the destruction of Jerusalem.

In the next verse, John continued to speak about the teachers of the antichrist heresy:

They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us (1 John 2:19).

Writing before the AD 70 destruction, John pointed to the fact that many had left the true Church, and this was proof that they were in the last days before the fulfillment of Jesus’ prophecy in Matthew 24. True believers, he said, would discern the truth through the Holy Spirit, and they would hold to the truth of Jesus, thereby avoiding heresy (see 1 John 2:20–23).

By contrast, those who deny that Jesus is the Christ are antichrist: “*Who is the liar? It is **whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a person is the antichrist**—denying the Father and the Son*” (1 John 2:22). This is a much broader definition of *antichrist* than an individual future one-world ruler. Clearly, when using *antichrist*, John was writing about Gnosticism in the first century Church. He never spoke of a future one-world ruler possessed by satan himself.

Passage #2: Daniel 9:24–27

Many modern endtimes teachers use Daniel 9 to glean much of their information about the evil one-world ruler

they believe is in our future. Yet there is *no mention* of an antichrist figure in Daniel 9. The commentaries written before the 1830s agree that this passage is about Jesus, not the antichrist. As the famous commentator Matthew Henry says of Daniel 9:

We have here the answer that was immediately sent to Daniel's prayer, and it is a very memorable one, as it contains *the most illustrious prediction of Christ and gospel-grace that is extant in all the Old Testament*.³

But for the sake of conjecture, supposing we believe Daniel 9 is about a satan-possessed antichrist figure, here is what would need to happen in the future, according to Daniel 9:

- The Temple in Jerusalem must be rebuilt on the same spot as the current Dome of the Rock, a Muslim mosque.
- A functional priesthood must be reinstated.
- Animal sacrifice must be reinstituted in the rebuilt Temple.
- The antichrist must make a covenant with the whole world for three and a half years.
- The antichrist must enter the Temple, sit down as God, and end animal sacrifice.

A simple reading of Daniel 9:24–27 and a basic understanding of history shows us that this passage has already been fulfilled by Christ. Daniel 9 prophesies no antichrist.⁴

Passage #3: 2 Thessalonians 2:1–8

³ Henry, Daniel 9.

⁴ I address this passage in greater detail in chapter 5.

Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers and sisters, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by the teaching allegedly from us—whether by a prophecy or by word of mouth or by letter—asserting that the day of the Lord has already come (2 Thessalonians 2:1–2).

As noted in chapter 1, the phrase “*the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*” refers to the destruction of Jerusalem. When we understand this, we see that the Thessalonians apparently thought the *coming destruction* had already happened. It was possible for them to make this mistake because they were located in Greece, which is hundreds of miles away and had apparently been hearing rumors of the Romans going to attack Jerusalem.

The fact that the Thessalonians could think such a thing proves that they were expecting a local event to occur in Jerusalem, not a global apocalypse. This letter to the Thessalonians was written in approximately AD 50, and Thessalonica is hundreds of miles from Jerusalem. They were under the impression that the *coming* of Christ had already happened, which means they thought Jerusalem had been destroyed. In response, Paul wrote:

*Don’t let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until **the rebellion occurs** and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction (2 Thessalonians 2:3).*

The apostle Paul told the Thessalonians the destruction of Jerusalem would not come until the rebellion had occurred and the leader of the rebellion, the “man of lawlessness” or “the man of sin,” was revealed. He then told them what types of things this rebel leader would do.

He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so

that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God (2 Thessalonians 2:4).

This verse gives some clear indicator of who could and could not be the “man of sin.” For example, this person must be physically able to stand in the Temple and proclaim himself God. In other words, he would have had to be alive before AD 70, when the Temple was destroyed. At no time since AD 70 has a Temple existed for the man of sin to stand in, and not even one New Testament verse predicts a rebuilt Jewish Temple. This clearly dates the man of sin in the generation of AD 70.

In Chapter 1, about the destruction of Jerusalem, we met a few characters involved in that story. The main rebel *who caused* the destruction of Jerusalem was John Levi of Gischala. I believe he clearly fits the description of the man of lawlessness in this passage.

The Jewish historian Josephus wrote of how John Levi was a selfish, unscrupulous man with persuasive powers who convinced many that he was sent by God to liberate them. Further, John Levi took over the Temple, set himself up in the Temple as the Jewish savior (as God), looted the vessels of the Temple for their gold, and caused the daily animal sacrifices to cease. He also plundered the people, even burning their storehouses of food and causing the great famine that starved tens of thousands to death, and he enlisted aid from the Idumeans, who killed 8,500 of the Jews, including the priests. Second Thessalonians 2:9 speaks of counterfeit signs, the main one being that John Levi declared that he was God and would deliver the people from the Romans. He commanded the storehouses of food to be burned in faith that God would miraculously deliver them from their enemies. Instead they starved to death.

Even when the Roman General Titus pleaded that John Levi leave the Temple, so that it wouldn't be destroyed in battle, John flatly refused. John Levi caused the Temple to be destroyed; without him, the Temple might have been spared, considering that it was one of the wonders of the ancient world.⁵

In the next verses, Paul gave the Thessalonians more details about the man of lawlessness that also apply to John Levi:

*Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? And now **you know what is holding him back** [Ananus], so that he may be revealed at the proper time. For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but **the one who now holds it back** [Ananus] will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way (2 Thessalonians 2:5–7).*

John was not only a rebel leader, but also a false messiah. He claimed godhood by taking over the Temple, and the only person who stood in his way was the Jewish Chief Priest, Ananus. Ananus had tremendous diplomatic skills and had been able to negotiate peace treaties with Rome many times before. Ananus was literally able to *restrain* the full-scale rebellion that John Levi was aiming to accomplish.⁶ That is why Paul referred to the one who restrained, who must be taken out of the way.

Even Josephus noted that once Ananus (the one who restrains) was killed, then the destruction of Jerusalem began:

⁵ Information about John Levi in this section is gathered from Bray, *The Man of Sin of 2 Thessalonians 2*. For easier reference, all instances of John Levi in Holford's *The Destruction of Jerusalem* have been put in boldface.

⁶ Ibid.

I should not mistake if I said that *the death of Ananus was the beginning of the destruction of the city*, and that from this very day may be dated the overthrow of her wall, and the ruin of her affairs.⁷

As Josephus recorded, this happened exactly as the apostle Paul laid out for the Thessalonians:

*And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and **destroy by the splendor of his coming*** (2 Thessalonians 2:8).

When the “coming of the Lord” occurred with the destruction of Jerusalem, John Levi was finally dealt with. He was the cause of the rebellion that led to the attack by the Romans. John was a deceiver who declared “*lying signs and wonders*” (2 Thess 2:9–12) and caused the people to burn all the storehouses of food, claiming he was God and would provide for them! Then he set up his militia in the Temple, murdered all the priests, and caused not only all of Jerusalem to be destroyed, but even the Temple, which the Romans didn’t want to harm. John Levi was so evil it boggles the mind, and he most clearly fulfills Paul’s prophecy about the “man of sin” that many interpret to as the so-called future antichrist.

When we think about this passage in Second Thessalonians from the perspective of its original recipients, it does not make sense that Paul would have written a mysterious prophecy that had no value for his original readers and would not apply to anyone until more than two thousand years in the future. Instead, it is logical that this passage applied to its original hearers and was about their particular context. After all, Paul said the “*secret power of lawlessness*” was already in operation in

⁷ Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, 313.

the first century (2 Thess. 2:7). Paul was clearly talking about an evil person in the first century and another person who was restraining this evil. John Levi and Ananus fulfill this passage. The secret power of iniquity hasn't been in operation for two thousand years, waiting for *our* future. Instead, this lawlessness culminated in the AD 70 judgment of iniquity.

Passage #4: The Beast of Revelation 13 and 17

Revelation 13 speaks of the beast, which the majority of Church history has taught represents the Roman Empire of the first century. Revelation 17 speaks of another beast, which Church history has taught also represents the Roman Emperor Nero. Both of these are excellent and sensible explanations.

Revelation 17:10—The Emperor Nero

About the symbol of the beast, historian F.W. Farrar wrote in 1882:

Every Jewish reader, of course, saw that the Beast was a symbol of Nero. And both Jews and Christians regarded Nero as also having close affinities with the serpent or dragon....All the earliest Christian writers on the Apocalypse, from Irenaeus down to Victorinus of Pettau and Commodian in the fourth, and Andreas in the Fifth, and St. Beatus in the eighth century, connect Nero, or some Roman Emperor, with the Apocalyptic Beast.⁸

Many ancient sources also speak of Nero as a beast, as R.C. Sproul shows:

⁸ Farrar, *The Early Days of Christianity*, 471–472.

[Kenneth] Gentry gives a synopsis of Nero's violence-studded life, including the murders of his own family members, the castration of a boy Nero "married," and the brutal murder of his pregnant wife by kicking her to death. Bizarre behavior was noted by the historian Suetonius, who wrote that Nero even "devised a kind of game, in which, covered with the skin of some wild animal, he was let loose from a cage and attacked the private parts of men and women, who were bound to stakes."

Nero began his reign as emperor in A.D. 54. His imperial persecution of the Christian community was launched in A.D. 64, the same year as the famous fire (which burned 1/3 of Rome) that many believe was set by Nero himself. It is often assumed that the persecution of Christians, whom Nero blamed for the fire, was a diversionary tactic to shift blame for his own actions to others. Nero committed suicide in A.D. 68, when he was but 31 years of age.

Since the beast's appearance is one of the "things, which must shortly take place" (Rev. 1:1), Nero is at least a *prima facie* candidate for the role of the beast. As described by ancient historians, Nero is a singularly cruel and unrestrained man of evil. Many ancient writers cite the bestial character of Nero, and Gentry summarizes these references:

Tacitus...spoke of Nero's "cruel nature" that "put to death so many innocent men."
Roman naturalist Pliny the Elder...described Nero as "the destroyer of the human race" and "the poison of the world." Roman satirist Juvenal...speaks of "Nero's cruel and bloody tyranny." ...Apollonius of Tyana...specifically mentions that Nero was

called a “beast” : “In my travels, which have been wider than ever man yet accomplished, I have seen many many wild beasts of Arabia and India; but this beast, that is commonly called a Tyrant, I know not how many heads it has, nor if it be crooked of claw, and armed with horrible fangs...And of wild beasts you cannot say that they were ever known to eat their own mother, but Nero has gorged himself on this diet.”⁹

We find the clearest proof for this interpretation of Nero as beast in Revelation 17:10, “*They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for only a little while.*” This verse, which is speaking of the line of rulers in Rome, tells us exactly how many rulers had already come, which one was currently in power, and that the next one would only last a short while. This timetable perfectly fits Nero and the Roman Empire of the first century:

“Five have fallen...”

Julius Caesar (49–44 BC)

Augustus (27 BC–AD 14)

Tiberius (AD 14–37)

Gaius (AD 37–41)

Claudius (AD 41–54)

“One is...”

Nero (AD 54–68)

“the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for only a little while.”

⁹ Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus*, 186–187.

Galba (June AD 68–January AD 69, a six month ruler-ship)

Of the first seven emperors of the Roman Empire, five had come (Julius Caesar, Augustus, Tiberius, Gaius, and Claudius), one was now in power (Nero), and one had not yet come (Galba), but would only remain a little time (six months). Because of this clear description, through much of Church history people have understood the beast in Revelation 17 to refer to Nero.

Revelation 13:1–4—The Roman Empire

Recognizing Nero as the beast of Revelation 17 helps us interpret Revelation 13's reference to another beast:

...And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. It had...seven heads....One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed. The whole world was filled with wonder and followed the beast. People worshiped the dragon because he had given authority to the beast, and they also worshiped the beast and asked, "Who is like the beast? Who can wage war against it?" (Revelation 13:1–4).

Nero fits the Revelation 17 timeline as the sixth of the seven emperors of Rome (or heads of the beast). Galba, who followed him, was "*the one to come that shall only remain a little while.*" Galba's short reign happened, at least in part, because Rome was metaphorically wounded and faltering as an empire because of Nero. Nero was a psychopath who burned down one third of Rome, pinned the blame on the Christians, and persecuted them brutally. He did many cruel and terrible things during his reign.

Then, when Nero killed himself in AD 68, the political climate of Rome changed dramatically. Most significantly, Nero was the last of the Julio-Claudian line of emperors; the line ended, and it would have seemed, symbolically, as

if the head of the empire had been wounded to death. Nero's sudden death caused an event that has been historically called the "Year of the Four Emperors." Because of tumult caused by his suicide, three short-lived emperors followed Nero (Galba, Otho, and Vitellius). Finally, near the end of AD 69, Vespasian took the throne and ruled until AD 80. But during the unrest of AD 69, many thought the Roman Empire was about to die.¹⁰

Can you imagine if the United States had four presidents in office in a one-year period? This was a very painful year for Rome, and many thought the beast of the Roman Empire had been wounded unto death. In fact, this was the most tumultuous time in Roman history since Mark Antony's death in 30 BC, nearly 100 years earlier. Yet, by what appeared to be a miraculous turn around, the Empire was revived under Vespasian and Titus. When they came into power, they established the Flavian dynasty of Caesars. Instead of the beast dying, it resurrected under Vespasian, and he ruled for a solid ten years.

The Mark of the Beast

Often this subject of the beast is connected in people's minds with the infamous mark of the beast found in Revelation 13:16–17. This mark of the beast has been the cause of much fear, so I will address it here, even though I am not covering the entire Book of Revelation.¹¹ Regarding the mark of the beast, it is important to note that in the ancient culture of Rome, the public market was the main source of trade and retail. For people to enter the public market, they had to pass through the main gate. It was required of all who entered the main gate to pay homage to the idol of the Emperor. Once homage was paid, ashes were

¹⁰ "Emperor Nero," *The Preterist Archive*,
<http://preteristarchive.com/Rome/Monarchs/nero.html>.

¹¹ For more on Revelation, read my book, *The Art of Revelation*.

placed on the hand or on the forehead of the individual, and then they were allowed to pass through the gates and buy and sell merchandise.¹² This was called “taking the mark.” The parallels between this and the mark of the beast are stunning, and they further confirm the reality that the beast was Nero and the Roman Empire.

About the mark of the beast, the prestigious theologian N.T. Wright says:

What’s more, worshipping or not worshipping was quickly becoming the dividing line between people who were acceptable in the community and people who weren’t. Not long after this time, some local officials introduced a formal requirement that unless you had offered the required sacrifices you weren’t allowed in the market. There were various kinds of marks and visible signs, which were used to set people apart either as ‘able to trade’ or as ‘not able to trade’. From quite early on the Christians were faced with a stark alternative: stay true to the lamb and risk losing your livelihood, the ability to sell or buy; capitulate to the monster, sacrifice to Caesar at the behest of the local officials, and then everything will be all right-except your integrity as one of the lamb’s followers.¹³

Another author adds:

The Christians of the first century were under the military authority of Rome, a nation which openly proclaimed its rulers, the Caesars, to be divine. All those under the jurisdiction of Rome were

¹² “Revelation 13:18: Number of the Beast,” *The Preterist Archive*, http://preteristarchive.com/BibleStudies/ApocalypseCommentaries/revelation_13-18.html.

¹³ Wright, *Revelation for Everyone*, 121.

required by law to publicly proclaim their allegiance to Caesar by burning a pinch of incense and declaring, “Caesar is Lord.” Upon compliance with this law, the people were given a papyrus document called a “libellus,” which they were required to present when either stopped by the Roman police or attempting to engage in commerce in the Roman marketplace, increasing the difficulty of “buying or selling” without this mark. This is the essence of Scripture’s warnings to the early Christians against taking upon themselves the “mark of the beast.”¹⁴

Clearly, the mark of the beast was a first-century reality perpetuated by an emperor and empire that were truly beastly. The beast we read of in Revelation is not a coming antichrist or the man of lawlessness. John’s vision of the beast has already been fulfilled in Nero and the Roman Empire. We can all be thankful that no beast-like “antichrist” world ruler exists in our future.

Chapter Points

- The antichrist is not and never was a person; it is a spiritual system of false teaching, specifically Gnosticism.
- Jesus is the perfect and sensible fulfillment of Daniel 9; there is no antichrist in this passage.
- The man of lawlessness was a first century individual; the restrainer was another first century individual—specifically John Levi and the High Priest Ananus.

¹⁴ Richard Anthony, “The Mark of the Beast,” *Ecclesia.org*, <http://www.ecclesia.org/truth/beast.html>.

- The beast of Revelation is the Roman Empire, especially under Nero Caesar.
- Nothing in the Bible points to a future one-world government ruler.

Discussion Questions

1. What fruit have you seen from the one-world ruler teaching in the Church?
2. What four passages are used to create the composite known as the antichrist?
3. Who is Daniel 9:24–27 speaking of?
4. What did Matthew Henry say about Daniel 9?
5. What was John writing about in First and Second John when he mentioned the spirit of antichrist?
6. Who was John Levi, and what did he do?
7. Who was the beast?

Chapter 3

The End of the World

In Matthew 24, the disciples asked Jesus three questions: *“When will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”* (Matt. 24:3). As we saw in chapter 1, in Matthew 24 Jesus prophesied exactly what would take place in the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in AD 70. But did Jesus answer the other two questions: “What is the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” Before we can understand the answers Jesus gave, we have to be sure we understand all three questions.

When will this happen?

This question is clearly in reference to what Jesus had *just* been saying about the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem, as discussed in chapter 1.

What is the sign of your coming?

Our automatic reaction is to think the disciples were asking about Jesus’ second coming. But if we step back and think for a moment, we will remember the disciples had no idea Jesus was about to die and be resurrected. It is impossible to think they were asking Jesus about His second coming, which would be thousands of years away. They were still in shock that Jesus had chewed out the Pharisees; they weren’t suddenly asking Jesus about His second coming but about something else closely related to the first question.

After answering their first question in great detail, He responded to their question about the sign of His coming:

And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth [literally, “tribes of the land”] will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory (Matthew 24:30 NASB).

Here, Jesus answered them according to a common idiom in Jewish culture. He could do this because the Jews of His day were much more familiar with the Old Testament than most Christians are today. It was the bedrock of their cultural life, and because of that, many phrases and words carried a symbolic meaning associated with biblical prophecy. David Chilton explains it like this:

In order to understand the meaning of Jesus’ expressions in this passage, we need to understand the Old Testament much more than most people do today. Jesus was speaking to an audience that was intimately familiar with the most obscure details of Old Testament literature. They had heard the Old Testament read and expounded countless time throughout their lives, and had memorized lengthy passages. Biblical imagery and forms of expression had formed their culture, environment, and vocabulary from earliest infancy, and this had been true for generations. The fact is that when Jesus spoke to His disciples about the fall of Jerusalem, *He used prophetic vocabulary*. There was a “language” of prophecy, instantly recognizable to those familiar with the Old Testament.¹

Throughout the Old Testament, when God was going to bring destruction upon a city or a nation, it was said that He

¹ Chilton, *The Great Tribulation*, 17–18.

would “come on clouds in the sky.” In the Jewish culture, the phrase “*sign of your coming*” had little to do with location and arrival. It was understood to mean coming in judgment upon a city or nation. Thus, we find “coming on clouds” imagery throughout Old Testament prophecies of judgment. When Isaiah prophesied Egypt’s destruction, he pictured God riding on a cloud to bring judgment:

A prophecy against Egypt: See, the LORD rides on a swift cloud and is coming to Egypt. The idols of Egypt tremble before him, and the hearts of the Egyptians melt with fear (Isaiah 19:1).

Similarly, in Psalm 18, God is shown as having dark clouds under His feet. His judgment goes forth as dark storm clouds, with hailstones and lightning (see Ps. 18:9–12). And in Psalm 104, the clouds are called God’s chariot, and He is seen riding forth into battle “*on the wings of the wind*” (Ps. 104:2–3). In Joel 2:2, the day of the Lord is imaged as “*a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness.*” Zephaniah echoes this imagery in his prophecy of the day of the Lord word-for-word (see Zeph. 1:14–15). And when speaking of God’s judgment of the guilty, Nahum says, the “*clouds are the dust of his feet*” (Nah. 1:3). Clearly, the clouds are Old Testament symbolism for God’s vehicle to “come” in judgment against a nation or city.

Realizing this, we can see that the disciples were asking when Jesus would come in judgment upon Jerusalem. Jesus understood their question and responded with many signs leading up to verse 30, where He would finally “come on clouds” and bring judgment.

What about the end of the age?

As modern readers, it is easy for us to assume the disciples were asking about the end of the world. Yet, we

have no sensible explanation for why they would suddenly switch subjects from Jesus' rebuking of the Pharisees and declaration of the destruction of the Temple. It doesn't make logical sense, in context, that they would switch topics mid-sentence to ask about something unrelated.² Therefore, the disciples must have still been asking questions about Jesus' previous statements. In other words, when they asked about the "end of the age," they were *not* asking about the *end of the world*.

This is easily confirmed by looking at the original language. In Greek, the word for "world" is *kosmos*, whereas the word for "age" is *aion*. The disciples asked Jesus about the end of the *aion*. They did not ask about the end of the *kosmos*. What is the difference between the end of the world and the end of the age? The answer is found in the cumulative result of the AD 70 events Jesus prophesied—the end of an era in Jewish history and religion. The destruction of the Temple meant the end of the sacrificial system and priesthood. The system of atonement established by Moses ended with the destruction of the Temple. This was a huge shift—the end of the age of Moses and the old covenant. This is what the disciples were asking Jesus about. He had just prophesied the end of Judiasm as they knew it, and they wanted to know when that end would be.

This idea was not new to the people of Jesus' day. The Jewish people recognized two ages—the one in which they then lived (under the Law) and the future age of the

² J. Marcellus Kik, in his groundbreaking work, *An Eschatology of Victory*, made a major exegetical error when he claimed that AD 70 fulfilled the first two questions of Matthew 24:3 but that the third question was about the end of the world. This error has been repeated in *Victorious Eschatology* 2nd edition by Eberle and Trench, as well as *Win the World or Escape the Earth* by Rossol and Watsall. For an in depth examination of this error, which I have labeled Kik Preterism, see my other work, *Understanding the Whole Bible*.

Messiah. As commentator John Broadus states, “A common Jewish conception was that the appearing of the Messiah would close ‘this age,’ and introduce ‘the coming age’—these phrases often occurring in the Talmud.”³

To this, George Hill adds:

Time was divided by the Jews into two great periods, the age of the law and the age of the Messiah. The conclusion of the one was the beginning of the other, the opening of that kingdom which the Jews believed the Messiah was to establish, which was to put an end to their sufferings, and to render them the greatest people upon the earth. The apostles, full of this hope, said to our Lord, immediately before his ascension, “Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” [Acts 1:6]. Our Lord used the phrase of his coming to denote his taking vengeance upon the Jews by destroying their city and sanctuary.⁴

Throughout the New Testament, much written about the age of Moses, which was about to come to an end, but very little is said about the end of the whole world. Because the Israelites had lived as the chosen people with exclusive access to God for approximately 1,500 years, this was to be the single largest event to ever occur in their national history.⁵

The common belief that Jesus was talking about the end of the world in Matthew 24 has distorted the understanding of many other New Testament verses. When we realize the

³ Broadus, 482.

⁴ Hill, “Predictions Delivered by Jesus,” 103–104.

⁵ It is also interesting to note that Jesus was the only prophet prophesying that He would come on the clouds to destroy Jerusalem and end the age of Moses. By comparison, the false prophets of the first century were declaring that they had come to save Israel from the Roman rule.

disciples were asking about the end of the age of Moses, we receive clarity about many verses about the end of the age of Moses and the destruction in AD 70 that are scattered throughout the New Testament. Contrary to popular belief, these verses are not about the end of the world. For example:

...You [the twelve] will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes (Matthew 10:23).

...You [the high priest] will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven (Matthew 26:64).

Now it is high time to awake out of sleep... the night is far spent, the day is at hand... (Romans 13:11–12).

...The form of this world is passing away (1 Corinthians 7:31 NASB).

On [us]...the ends of the ages have come (1 Corinthians 10:11 NASB).

...The Lord is at hand (Philippians 4:5 NKJV).

...The coming of the Lord is at hand.... Behold, the Judge is standing at the door (James 5:8–9 NKJV).

The end of all things is at hand... (1 Peter 4:7 NKJV).

...It is the last hour...we know that it is the last hour (1 John 2:18 NKJV).

It is true that Jesus will return in bodily form to resurrect the dead and bring final judgment. Yet most of the “end of the age” language used in the New Testament is not about these events. Instead, it refers to the biggest event in Jewish history—which was about to happen. The first century Jews were not focused on the end of the planet; that

is a modern obsession that had almost no relevance to them.

First century Christians living in Israel knew they had only forty years to spread the gospel before Jesus came on clouds to destroy Jerusalem and they had to flee to the mountains. Because of this, they spoke of it being “the last hour” and “the latter times.” They said things like, “He is standing at the door,” and, “The Lord is at hand and the day is about to come.” This was their reality, but it is not ours. We must choose to stop taking what the New Testament authors meant for those living between AD 30 and AD 70 and applying it to our future.

Many false doctrines have been created when people have read the Bible apart from its historical and cultural context. The belief that Jesus was prophesying about the end of the world is one. Two other related examples are the expectations of an apostasy of the Church and coming false teachers. Neither one of these will be part of the end of the world, but they were a sign of the end of the age of Moses in AD 70.

Apostasy

The concept of a future fallen apostate church is a false teaching based on a misunderstanding of Scripture apart from its historical context. Some teachers have tried to force Church history into seven time periods and line them up with the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3. These individuals say the modern Church is the church of Laodicea, which Jesus threatened to vomit out of His mouth. Not only is this concept incorrect, but it also contradicts what Jesus said about the growth of His Kingdom (see Matt. 13:31–33).

One of the verses used to substantiate this teaching is Second Thessalonians 2:3, which says, “*Let no man*

*deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a **falling away first**, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition*" (KJV). Over the last fifty years, this verse has been used to claim that the majority of the Church is not actually walking with God. Those who teach this say the true Church is merely a remnant of those who claim to be the Church. But it is an error to drag the Old Testament remnant idea into the New Testament, where it does not belong (I will discuss this more in chapter 10). Also, as mentioned in chapter 2, this verse is about a rebellious person called the man of sin (John Levi⁶), not about the Church. The NIV translates this verse better:

*Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until **the rebellion occurs** and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction* (2 Thessalonians 2:3).

The rebellion occurred in the first century under John Levi. We are not looking for a future falling away to fulfill this passage.

False Teachers

Similar to the idea of the apostate Church is the belief that many false teachers will arise before the return of Christ. This belief has created a great excuse for finger-pointing in the body of Christ and empowers a suspicious and fearful attitude toward others. However, the verses used to support this teaching actually refer to the time leading up to AD 70, not to our own day. For example, Paul wrote:

⁶ For easy reference, his name, John Levi, has been put in bold in the rendition of Holford's *The Destruction of Jerusalem* in chapter 1.

For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths (2 Timothy 4:3–4).

The sound doctrine Paul spoke of was the teaching that judgment was coming to Jerusalem, but the itching ears wanted to hear from false prophets and teachers who declared God's protection from destruction. This created the stage for a major rise in false prophets and teachers between AD 30 and AD 70.

Another verse used to support the expectation of false teachers is First Timothy 4:1, "*Now the Spirit expressly says that **in latter times** some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons*" (NKJV). However, the latter times referred to by Paul were not two thousand years in the future. Paul was speaking of the false teachers and false prophets of the first century (the same is true of Second Timothy 3).

Along these lines, many people have also misunderstood Amos 8:11, where God promises, "*I will send a famine through the land—not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the LORD.*" They interpret this as applying to the end of the world, but it is not a New Testament prophecy. Actually, it was fulfilled by the four hundred years between the end of the Old Testament and the start of the New Testament, when there was no recorded spoken word from God. It is not about our future.

Though many try to use these verses and others to teach a future increase in false teachers, the Bible clearly tells us these passages refer to the first century. The apostle Paul said false teachers would arrive soon after he left:

*I know that **after I leave**, [not 2,000 years later] savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears (Act 20:29–31).*

And Jesus said He would not delay His coming but would come quickly:

*And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? **Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly.** However, when the Son of Man **comes**, will he find faith on the earth? (Luke 18:7–8)*

Jesus promised to bring justice to His people quickly. These verses do not refer to future events. That would hardly be a fair definition of the word *quickly*. Instead, He promised to *come* in destruction of Jerusalem within fifty years, and that is exactly what He did.

Chapter Points

- There is no separation in the three questions the disciples asked Jesus.
- There is no separation in the answers Jesus gave His disciples.
- When the New Testament mentions the end of the age, it is referring to the end of the age of Moses, not the end of the world.
- The idea of the seven churches of Revelation corresponding with seven periods in Church history has no foundation.

- The Kingdom of God is growing, and we are not looking for a future falling away of the Church.
- The passages speaking of false teachers, teachings, and prophets were all fulfilled in the first century. These have no prophetic significance for the modern day, but they have *practical* significance. We still need to use discernment regarding teaching and judge the fruit, but we are not looking for a future apostasy.

Discussion Questions

1. What are the three questions of Matthew 24:3?
2. Is it logical to think the disciples were asking about the end of the world and the rapture in this passage? Why or why not?
3. Define the meanings of *aion* and *kosmos*.
4. Explain the important difference of translation between *end of the world* and *end of the age* in Matthew 24:3.
5. What does *end of the age* mean? When was the end of the age?
6. Since the last days of the Mosaic Age ended in AD 70, what *age* do we live in now?

Chapter 4

Melting Elements

For almost two decades, I believed that one day in the future the whole earth would be consumed by fire when Jesus returned. Considering that God had promised Noah He wouldn't use water to destroy the earth (see Gen. 9:11), I figured He would be able to destroy the earth with fire and still keep His promise. This was my understanding of Second Peter 3:5–7:

But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens came into being and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth [ge] are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

Like many others, I had never looked very closely at the context of this passage and had simply arrived at my conclusion: Peter was describing God's crafty way around His promise to Noah by destroying earth without using water. Now that I have studied this passage, it is humorous to look back at what I used to think. It makes me wonder sometimes how wrong I might still be in other areas I haven't studied yet.

Awaiting His Coming

To understand this passage properly, we must look at the context of Second Peter 3, starting with verse one.

Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking. I want you to

recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles (2 Peter 3:1–2).

Here Peter said the purpose of his letter was to remind his readers about some specific words and commands from the Old Testament, Jesus, and the apostles. In the next verses, he clarified what commands he was talking about:

*Above all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, “**Where is this ‘coming’ he promised?** Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation” (2 Peter 3:3–4).*

In other words, Peter was referring to Jesus’ promise that He would come, which as we learned previously, was a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem. Peter wrote between AD 30 and AD 70, during a time when the Jews were bringing tremendous persecution upon the Christians. The Christians were clinging to the hope of Jesus’ words in Matthew 24 that judgment was about to come upon Jerusalem and the Jewish religious system. In the above passage, we see that the Christians were being mocked for believing Jesus was actually coming to bring judgment upon the Temple. Peter continued:

But they deliberately forget that long ago by God’s word the heavens came into being and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth [ge] are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly (2 Peter 3:5–7).

Here Peter responded to the mockers’ statements by showing how God has judged before and affirming that

God will judge again. He then made a statement that has caused much confusion:

But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day (2 Peter 3:8).

If there is one passage that is abused more than almost any other, it is Second Peter 3:8. Countless people have used this passage to make prophetic mathematics work in their wild endtime theories. Yet Peter was simply quoting from Psalm 90:4—“*For a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night.*” He was not proposing a formula by which to figure out the end of the world. Peter was *not* saying that to God time is nebulous or relative. Peter was quoting from a psalm that speaks of how time is of little value or importance to an infinite and eternal God. Time is real to God, but not in the same way as it is for us. Peter continued this thought by saying:

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

In Matthew 24:34, Jesus said His words would come to pass *within* a generation. Here is a simple equation for the timeframe of his prophecy: AD 30 + forty-year generation = AD 70. Jesus could have come back in AD 50, midway through the prophesied generation, but He chose to wait until the last moment of His forty-year prophecy so that people would have more time to repent. This is why Peter talked about God’s patience, which seemed like slowness to the Christians suffering persecution. But he reassured the believers that the day of the Lord would come:

*But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; **the elements will be destroyed** by fire... (2 Peter 3:10).*

The phrase *the elements will be destroyed* is tremendously significant in understanding this whole chapter. Since it appears again in the passage, I will address this phrase further in a moment.

*...and the **earth**... (2 Peter 3:10).*

The word for “earth” used here in the Greek is *ge*, not *kosmos*. *Ge* is the word for “land,” whereas *kosmos* is the word for “the whole world.” This is not about the destruction of the planet earth (*kosmos*), but it is about the destruction of the land of Israel (*ge*).

*...and **everything done in it** will be laid bare (2 Peter 3:10).*

Since the root word *ge* is used, this verse is clearly saying, “*everything done in it* [in the land] *will be laid bare.*” This is exactly what took place at the AD 70 destruction. The sacrifices were stopped, the priesthood was killed, the Temple was destroyed, and the buildings were leveled to the ground. Jerusalem was laid bare. In light of this, Peter added:

Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming... (2 Peter 3:11–12).

The question Peter posed to his readers is: “Considering that this great wrath is about to be poured out upon the religious system, how should one live?” Peter encouraged his readers to live godly lives as they awaited and hastened the arrival of the day of the Lord. Throughout the New Testament, we read that the first-century believers were eagerly awaiting the *coming* of the Lord (see 1 Cor. 1:6–8;

Phil. 3:20; 1 Thess. 1:9–10), and one element of waiting for Jesus' coming (as mentioned here) was *hastening it*. Jesus had instructed His disciples concerning how they were to hasten His arrival. He told them that if they petitioned God for justice, God would certainly hear their prayers and avenge them quickly by means of the coming of the Son of Man.

And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:7–8)

The first century Church under persecution cried out to God *day and night*. This was a part of the hastening process.

The Elements

Peter continued his letter, saying:

*...That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and **the elements** will melt in the heat* (2 Peter 3:12).

The Greek word Peter used for “elements” is *stoicheion*. This word appears only five other times in the New Testament (see Gal. 4:3, 9; Col. 2:8, 20; Heb. 5:12), and in each occurrence, it refers to the basic principles of the Mosaic Law.

In Galatians, Paul referred twice to these elements. First, he stated that the Jews had been under the elements of the world until the fullness of time had come; then, he asked his readers why they would want to return to these elements.

*So also, when we were underage, we were in slavery under the **elemental** spiritual forces of the world (Galatians 4:3).*

*But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly **elements**, to which you desire again to be in bondage? (Galatians 4:9 NKJV)*

In context, these elements concerned rituals and observances of feast days (see Gal. 4:9–10). In other words, Paul was trying to keep his readers from coming under the principles of the Law again (see Gal. 5:1).

In Colossians, Paul also referred twice to these elements, warning his readers not to let anyone hold them captive to the elements of the world, for by accepting Christ, they had died to these elements; therefore, they did not need to submit to such things:

*See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the **elemental** spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ (Colossians 2:8).*

*Since you died with Christ to the **elemental** spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules: “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!”? **These rules**, which have to do with things that **are all destined to perish** with use, are based on merely human commands and teachings (Colossians 2:20–22).*

As the context of this letter makes clear, Paul was encouraging his readers not to let anyone judge them for failing to observe feast days, festivals, and Sabbaths, because those things merely foreshadowed the person and work of Christ (see Col. 2:16). So again, we find that the

elements of the world referred to the principles of Judaism—and Paul went on to remind his readers that these rules were destined to perish!

The writer of Hebrews also commented on these elements saying,

*By this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the **elementary** [stoicheion] **truths** [logion] of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food (Hebrews 5:12).*

The Greek word the writer used for “truths” is *logion*, a word used elsewhere in the New Testament to refer to the Old Covenant (see Acts 7:38; Rom. 3:2). In context, the author was expressing regret that he had to teach his Jewish readers how the basics of the Law foreshadowed the work of Christ in order to implore them to leave those principles of the Law for the sake of a new and better covenant (see Heb. 5:12–14; 6:1; 7:22; 10:1). From all this we can see that the apostle Peter was not talking about the destruction of the elements of the periodic table (created in 1869). He was writing of the destruction of the elements of Judaism.

New Heaven and New Earth

In the next verse of Second Peter 3, Peter made an important shift:

But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells (2 Peter 3:13).

Peter started this chapter by saying, “I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by **the holy prophets** and the command given by our **Lord and Savior** through your **apostles**” (2 Pet. 3:2). In verses 3–12, Peter then addressed Jesus’ prophecy in Matthew 24.

Until this point, Peter had not yet quoted from the *holy prophets* of old. But in verse 13, Peter stopped quoting the words of the apostles (Paul and the destruction of the Jewish elements) and the words of Jesus (about the destruction of the land) and he began quoting the holy prophets of old:

For, behold, I create new heavens, and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind (Isaiah 65:17 NASB).

“For as the new heavens and the new earth which I will make shall remain before Me,” says the LORD... (Isaiah 66:22 NKJV).

Here Peter pulls on Old Testament prophecy about the day when God would create a new heavens and new earth. Modern readers have assumed these passages refer to a literal new heaven and new earth that will be formed in the wake of the destruction of our current earth. However, just as Peter was not talking about the destruction of the earth, he also was not talking about a literal new heaven and earth. In Hebrew culture and Scripture, the phrase *heaven and earth* was a common idiom used to refer to a system of government and specifically to the system of the old covenant Law.

Theologian Gary DeMar uses Second Peter 3 to prove that the end of the age (in Matthew 24:3) was the end of the Mosaic covenant in AD 70. DeMar also quotes the famous commentators John Owen and John Lightfoot on this matter:

John Owen (1616–1683) maintained that the “passing of heaven and earth” in 2 Peter 3:5–7 had reference, “not to the last and final judgment of the world, but to that utter desolation and destruction that was to be made of the Judaical church and state” in A.D. 70. John Brown (1784–

1858), commenting on Matthew 5:18, follows the same methodology.

“Heaven and earth passing away,” understood literally, is the dissolution of the present system of the universe; and the period when that is to take place, is called the “end of the world.” But a person at all familiar with the phraseology of the Old Testament Scriptures knows that the dissolution of the Mosaic economy, and the establishment of the Christian, is often spoken of as the removing of the old earth and heavens, and the creation of a new earth and new heavens.”

After surveying how this language is used throughout the Bible and in Jewish literature, John Lightfoot applies the “passing away of heaven and earth” to the “destruction of Jerusalem and the whole Jewish state...as if the whole frame of this world were to be dissolved.”¹

This is one of the major points of the New Testament, which sadly so many Christians have missed—the removal of the old covenant world and the establishment of the new covenant Kingdom.

Maimonides, the Jewish Philosopher from the 1100s, also confirmed this interpretation of *heaven and earth*:

The Arabs likewise [as the Hebrew prophets] say of a person who has met with a serious accident, “His heavens, together with his earth, have been covered”; and when they speak of the approach of a nation’s prosperity, they say, “The light of the sun and moon has increased,” A new heaven and a

¹ DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, 192.

new earth has been created,” or they use similar phrases.²

And Josephus records how the Temple (tabernacle) was viewed as a representation of the universe—the heavens and earth:

...for if any one do but consider the fabric of the tabernacle, and take a view of the garments of the high priest, and of those vessels which we make use of in our sacred ministration, he will find that our legislator was a divine man, and that we are unjustly reproached by others; for if any one do without prejudice, and with judgment, look upon these things, he will find they were everyone made in way of imitation and representation of the universe. When Moses distinguished the tabernacle into three parts, and allowed two of them to the priests, as a place accessible and common, he denoted the land and the seas, these being of general access to all; but he set apart the third division for God, because heaven is inaccessible to men.³

Thus, when the Temple was destroyed, the Jews saw it as the destruction of the heaven and the earth. And the new covenant that came to replace it can aptly be called a new heaven and a new earth—a new system by which humanity can relate to God. Hebrews 12 also uses this imagery of *heaven and earth* to describe the transition from the inferior old covenant to the unshakable and eternal new covenant:

See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who

² Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, 204.

³ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 3, Chapter 7.

*warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven? At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." **The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain.** Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe (Hebrews 12:25–28).*

The one last shaking here specifically refers to the removal of the physical, natural Temple age of the first century. The old covenant world was about to be shaken, and only the invisible Kingdom of God would remain once the shaking of AD 70 was finished. Disappointingly, many preachers reference Hebrews 12 when major catastrophes occur, such as earthquakes, economic downturns, wars, and terrorist attacks. They do this because they do not understand its context. The writer of Hebrews was referring to AD 70 and nothing else. This passage is about moving from physical worship (see Heb. 12:18–21) to a spiritual form of worship (see Heb. 12:22–24).

Concerning the Hebrews 12 shaking of the earth and the heavens, James Stuart Russell wrote:

What, then, is the great catastrophe symbolically represented as the shaking of the earth and heavens? No doubt it is the over-throw and abolition of the Mosaic dispensation, or the old covenant; the destruction of the Jewish church and state, together with all the institutions and ordinances connected therewith. There were "heavenly things" belonging to that dispensation: the laws, and statutes, and ordinances, which were

divine in their origin, and might be properly called the “*spiritualia*” of Judaism-these were the *heavens*, which were to be shaken and removed. There were also “earthly things”: the literal Jerusalem, the material temple, the land of Canaan-these were the *earth*, which was in like manner to be shaken and removed. The symbols are, in fact, equivalent to those employed by our Lord when predicting the doom of Israel. “Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the powers of *the heavens shall be shaken*.” (Mt 24:29) Both passages refer to the same catastrophe and employ very similar figures; besides which we have the authority of our Lord for fixing the event and the period of which He speaks within the limits of the generation then in existence; that is to say, the references can only be to the judgment of the Jewish nation and the abrogation of the Mosaic economy at the Parousia.⁴

To this, C.H. Spurgeon adds this reflection on the transition from the old covenant world to the new covenant world:

Did you ever regret the absence of the burnt-offering, or the red heifer, or any one of the sacrifices and rites of the Jews? Did you ever pine for the feast of tabernacles, or the dedication? No, because, though these were like the old heavens and earth to the Jewish believers, they have passed away, and we now live under new heavens and a new earth, so far as the dispensation of the divine

⁴ Russell, 289–290.

teaching is concerned. The substance is come, and the shadow has gone: and we do not remember it.⁵

This is the true meaning of the new heavens and earth. Peter ended his discussion of the melting elements, the destruction of the old covenant world and system, by reminding his readers of the coming new heavens and earth. He then ended this section of his letter by saying:

So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction (2 Peter 3:14–16).

Here Peter declared he was writing of the same things that Paul wrote about. As we have seen, when Paul wrote concerning the elements of the world, he was referring to the basic principles of the old covenant. Thus, it is clear Peter was speaking of the passing of *the elements of Judaism*, not the end of the world or the destruction of the physical earth. In fact, not only was Peter *not* prophesying the world would be destroyed by fire, but also the New Testament does not contain even a single reference to the destruction of planet earth (the *kosmos*). Instead, when the New Testament speaks of the destruction of the world, it uses the root word *ge*, which means “land,” not globe. Not one verse predicts the destruction of the globe!

⁵ Spurgeon, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, Vol. 37, 354.

Chapter Points

- In Second Peter 3, Peter reminded his readers of the words of Jesus in Matthew, Paul's teachings, and Old Testament prophecy—specifically in relation to the promised destruction of Jerusalem.
- Jesus came in judgment on Jerusalem at the end of the prophesied generation (forty years) to give people as much time as possible to repent.
- The word translated “earth” here is *ge*, meaning “land,” not the planet earth. This prophecy is about the destruction of the land of Israel, not the whole world.
- Jesus said the early believers could hasten His coming by petitioning Him for justice.
- The phrase *the elements* refers to the Jewish Law, not to the periodic table elements, which is confirmed by many other New Testament passages.

Discussion Questions

1. Have each person summarize how they previously understood Second Peter 3 before they read this chapter.
2. What is the meaning and usage of the word *stoicheion* (elements)?
3. Regarding the heavens, earth, and elements passing away, could this be about the destruction of the old covenant system? Why or why not?
4. Where did Second Peter 3 fit into your thinking before? Where does it fit now?

Part 2

The PRESENT Growing Kingdom

Chapter 5

The Kingdom Transition

As a husband, the idea of my wife committing adultery is one of the most hurtful thoughts imaginable. But what if she were to commit adultery a dozen times? What about a few dozen times? This would be a completely devastating and heart-rending experience. Yet this is exactly what happened to God. In Jeremiah 31:31–33, we see the heartbreak that God experienced:

“The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD (Jeremiah 31:31–32).

All throughout their history, the Israelites failed to keep their covenant with God, and they played the whore with idols and false gods. God saw they were completely unable to keep up their side of the covenant, so He determined He would make a new covenant. Since humanity couldn’t hold up their side of the covenant, this new covenant would be made between God the Father and Jesus. This transition is predicted throughout the Old Testament.

Daniel’s Prophecy

The Prophet Daniel prophesied five specific things about the Messiah: the timing of the Messiah’s arrival, His death, the end of the old covenant, the confirming of the new covenant, and the coming destruction of Jerusalem

(see Dan. 9). One of the most significant verses from this chapter says:

Seventy “sevens” are decreed for your people and your holy city to: finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the Most Holy Place (Daniel 9:24).

The six activities prophesied in this passage were all fulfilled at Jesus’ first coming.

- **To finish the transgression:** By crucifying Christ, the Jews filled up the measure of their transgression; thus it was finished and judgment was due upon that generation.
- **To make an end of sins:** Christ offered one sacrifice for sins *forever* (see Heb. 10:12) and purged our sins (see Heb. 1:3).
- **To make reconciliation for iniquity:** Prior to Christ’s atoning sacrifice, we were enemies of God; now we have been reconciled to Him (see Rom. 5:8–11).
- **To bring in everlasting righteousness:** The everlasting new covenant provides a righteousness apart from the Law of the old covenant, by which no flesh was justified (made righteous) (see Rom. 3:19–26).
- **To seal up vision and prophecy:** Not a fulfilling, but a sealing up. This was part of the punishment upon national Israel, that both vision and prophet—eye and ear—were closed up so that “*seeing they would not see, and hearing they would not hear*” (Isa. 6:10; Acts 28:17–28; cf. Mic. 3:1–7).
- **To anoint the Most Holy:** This is the pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon the Church at Pentecost, anointing the temple of the living God (see 2 Cor. 6:16), the Most Holy.¹

¹ Martin, 234.

Simply put, God spoke to Israel through Daniel, giving them 490 years of grace to straighten up and change their ways. Scholars typically agree that prophetic numerology shows that the “seventy sevens” of this page equals 490 years (see Gen. 29:27; Lev. 25:8; Num. 14:34; Ezek. 4:4–6).

Diagram 1: 490 years on a timeline

I-----I

Daniel has a dream of 490 years

In the next verse, God also stated that He would not start the clock right away; the 490 years would start when the king said to rebuild Jerusalem. He also announced in this passage exactly when His Son, the Messiah, would come to Israel.

Know and understand this: From the time the word goes out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One the ruler, comes, there will be seven “sevens,” and sixty-two “sevens” [483 years]. It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble (Daniel 9:25).

The edict to restore Jerusalem was given in 457 BC under Artaxerxes, the king of Persia (see Ezra 7:12–26).

Diagram 2: 457 BC added to timeline

I-----→

457 BC

Edict to restore Jerusalem

From the time when Artaxerxes declared this in 457 BC until AD 27 was 483 years. In AD 27, Jesus came onto the scene, exactly as this prophecy indicates. In fact, the renowned commentator Matthew Henry, wrote of this prophecy that: “We have [in Daniel 9:24–27] the most

illustrious prediction of Christ and gospel-grace that is extant in all the Old Testament.”²

Diagram 3: 457 BC–AD 27 equals 483 years

I-----I

457 BC (483 years) AD 27

The prophecy continues, even telling of the Messiah’s death, “*After the sixty-two ‘sevens,’ [including the previous seven sevens, thus 69 weeks or 483 years] the Anointed One [Jesus] will be put to death and will have nothing...*” (Dan. 9:26).

After the prophecy finishes speaking about the 490 years of mercy being extended to Israel, telling the exact date of the Messiah’s coming, and prophesying His death, it then declares the coming destruction of Jerusalem.

...The people [the Roman armies] of the ruler [Titus] who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end [of Jerusalem], and desolations have been decreed (Daniel 9:26).

After this, God backs up for a moment to bring clarity to the last seven years of the 490 years of mercy. He states that halfway through the last seven years, the Messiah will confirm a new covenant (see Matt. 26:28) and put an end to the old covenant and its sacrificial system.

He [Jesus] will confirm a covenant with many for one “seven.” In the middle of the “seven” he will put an end to sacrifice and offering... (Daniel 9:27).

This prophecy tells exactly when the Messiah will show up (AD 27), that the Messiah will die, and that He will end

² Henry, Daniel 9.

the sacrificial system halfway through the last seven years of the 490 years. Jesus did this by His death on the cross exactly three and a half years after AD 27.

Diagram 4: The last seven is added and Jesus' death

(483 years) (3.5 years) (3.5 years)

I-----I-----I-----I
457 BC AD 27 AD 30 AD 33

This brings us to a fascinating point from the Gospels. When Peter asked Jesus how many times he had to forgive his brother, suggesting that seven times might be forgiving enough, Jesus replied that he should forgive seventy times seven, which is 490 times. Jesus was alluding to this prophecy from Daniel, and He was telling Peter to be as forgiving as God had been toward His wicked people (see Matt. 18:21).

Let's recap: Daniel heard the prophecy of 490 years of mercy being extended. He heard that the 490 years would start when the edict to rebuild Jerusalem went forth. After the edict was released and the clock started ticking, 483 years would go by, and then the Messiah would appear, which happened in AD 27, when Jesus began His ministry. Then, during the last seven years of the 490 years of mercy, the Messiah would end animal sacrifice, and He would also be put to death. This happened in AD 30. Out of the 490 years, this timeline still leaves us with three and a half years left on the clock.

Approximately, three and a half years after Jesus' death and resurrection, Stephen was stoned to death, which was approved of by the chief ruler of the synagogue (see Acts 7:1, 54–60). This was the end of God's mercy clock for Jerusalem. Not long after, God gave Peter the vision of the unclean animals and sent him to evangelize Cornelius' house (see Acts 10). He also converted Paul and sent Him

to the gentiles (see Acts 9:1–5). This completed the 490 years of mercy God had extended to His people.

Some Christians believe the last seven years of the Daniel 9 prophecy haven't happened yet. I agree with DeMar's assessment of such obvious error.

The idea of separation and the placement of an indeterminable gap between the two sets of weeks is one of the most unnatural and nonliteral interpretations of Scripture found in any eschatology system. This interpretation is taught by those who insist on a literal hermeneutic, if dispensationalists were consistent in their literalism, they would never manipulate Scripture to fit an already established prophetic system.³

In other words, all of the 490-year timeline from Daniel 9 was fulfilled consecutively, culminating in the years just prior to the destruction of Jerusalem.

The Abomination of Desolation

Jesus confirmed the timeline of Daniel's prophecy by mentioning it in His prophecy about AD 70. In Matthew 23, we read of Jesus in the Temple declaring woes and judgments against the wicked Israelites of His day. He declared destruction upon them and upon Jerusalem. Then in Matthew 24:15, Jesus referred to the last verse in this passage from Daniel 9:

*So when you see standing in the holy place "the abomination that causes desolation," **spoken of through the prophet Daniel**—let the reader understand—then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains (Matthew 24:15).*

³ DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, 95.

The last half of Daniel 9:27, which Jesus was referring to, says *“And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator”* (Dan. 9:27 ESV).

Jesus was saying in Matthew 24:15 that when His listeners in the first century saw the “abomination that causes desolation” they should flee Judea to the mountains. Fortunately for us, Jesus told us exactly what the abomination was in the parallel Gospel of Luke: *“When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near”* (Luke 21:20). The Roman army, which surrounded Jerusalem and brought utter desolation in AD 70, was the great abomination.

The prophecy from Daniel 9 is, as Matthew Henry wrote, “most remarkable.” It contains amazing predictions of Jesus’ arrival and death, the end of sacrifice, and the confirming of the new covenant. Yet it also contains the predicted destruction of Jerusalem. It is imperative that the modern Church teaches believers about the AD 70 destruction, as it is literally a predicted part of the Messianic gospel of Jesus Christ. The fact that it is unpleasant is not a good reason to avoid teaching it. Obviously, the cross of Christ was an unpleasant scene, yet all good preachers keep it central to their message.

The destruction of Jerusalem, the Temple, and the priesthood is a major part of understanding the gospel of Jesus Christ. To not understand the significance of the AD 70 destruction is to miss a major component of the redemption story. The destruction of Jerusalem is akin to the virgin birth, the cross, and the resurrection. I know that is a huge statement, but I believe it is absolutely true. Even though many Christians have not been taught about this event, it is still an essential component.

The Gospel of Doom?

The redemption message prophesied in the Old Testament (see Dan. 9:24–27) included:

- The Messiah's arrival
- The Messiah's death
- The end of the old covenant
- The confirming of a new covenant
- The coming destruction of Jerusalem

The fifth point, the destruction of Jerusalem, was the final removal of the old covenant and the confirmation that the new covenant had fully arrived. Many Christians have never heard about the AD 70 destruction and, thus, are literally missing a major piece of the redemption message. This information can be quite shocking when Christians discover it, because it is similar to being a Christian for fifty years and then hearing for the first time that Jesus was born of a virgin!

This is not how it should be. Throughout Jesus' ministry, He emphasized the coming destruction and its significance to the new covenant. In fact, the longest recorded prophetic word from Jesus is the Olivet Discourse (see Matt. 24; Mark 13; Luke 21), which decrees the destruction of Jerusalem. When Jesus was anointed for ministry, He quoted from Isaiah 61:1–2 in Luke 4:18–19, leaving off the final phrase “*and the day of vengeance of our God.*”

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor... (Isaiah 61:1–2a; Luke 4:18–19)

Later, He finished quoting the Isaiah passage in Luke 21:21, foretelling the coming destruction. For three years, He focused on the first part of His mission; then in Luke 21:21, He declared the last part of His mission, *the day of vengeance* upon Jerusalem.

Jesus also spoke of the coming destruction in several of His parables. In Matthew 22:5–7, Jesus told a parable to the Pharisees, saying when the king returned to deal with those who had killed his son, he would set their city on fire, which is a clear reference of the coming judgment upon Jerusalem. Earlier in Matthew 21:33–46, Jesus gave another parable in which God “*destroy[ed] those wicked men miserably*” (NKJV).

When John the Baptist prophesied that Jesus was coming, he said Jesus would baptize (immerse) with the Holy Spirit and with fire (see Matt. 3:11). It is reasonable to understand the immersion in the Holy Spirit as the day of Pentecost, whereas the immersion in fire happened when Jerusalem was burned to the ground. Even Peter confirmed this in Acts 2 by following up his discussion of the outpouring of the Spirit with a declaration of God’s coming in judgment. Likewise, at the end of the Book of Hebrews, where it says everything that can be shaken will be shaken (a clear reference to the AD 70 destruction), it also refers to God as “*a consuming fire*” (Heb. 12:29 NKJV). Here it foreshadows God’s *coming* upon Jerusalem and the earthly worship system as a consuming fire.

In Matthew 24, Jesus’ disciples asked Him about the end of the age of Moses, and Jesus responded about the coming destruction. For three years, Jesus had reached out to His people, and they had not received Him. Near the end of His ministry, He specifically focused on the destruction of the old system. In Matthew 22, He spoke of coming to set their city on fire. In Matthew 23, He gave a whole chapter of rebukes against the religious leaders, which

ended with a statement of how He longed to gather them under His wings, but they would not let Him (see Matt. 23:37). Then He declared that all the blood of the Old Testament would come in judgment upon that generation's head (see Matt. 23:31–36). And in Matthew 24 Jesus gave very precise, detailed answers to the disciples' questions regarding the coming judgment. As we can see, the coming destruction was a very large part of the gospel story.

All throughout the New Testament, the early Church was focused on the coming destruction of Jerusalem. It was an integral part of the good news Jesus brought—that judgment would begin at the house of God (see 1 Pet. 4:17). God was going to clean out His house and fully establish His spiritual Kingdom upon the removal of the previous establishment. The early Church referred to this coming event (AD 70) as the last days, the end of the age, and the day of judgment. We must properly understand these terms if we want to understand Jesus' message and the mindset of the early Church.

The End of the Age

- | | |
|-------------|--|
| Matt. 13:39 | The harvest is the end of the age. |
| Matt. 13:40 | So it will be at the end of this age. |
| Matt. 13:49 | So it will be at the end of the age. |
| Matt. 24:3 | What will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age? |
| Heb. 9:26 | But now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared |

The End

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| Matt. 10:22 | He who endures to the end will be saved. |
| Matt. 24:6 | But the end is not yet. |
| Matt. 24:13 | He who endures to the end shall be saved. |
| Matt. 24:14 | Then the end will come. |

- 1 Cor. 1:8 Who will also confirm you to the end.
1 Cor. 10:11 On whom the ends of the ages have come.
Heb. 3:6 Firm to the end.
Heb. 3:14 Hold the beginning of our confidence
steadfast to the end.
Heb. 6:11 Show the same diligence...until the end
1 Peter 4:7 The end of all things is at hand

The Last Times, Days, etc.

- 1 Tim. 4:1 In latter times some will depart from the
faith.
2 Tim. 3:1 In the last days perilous times will come.
Heb. 1:2 [God] has in these last days spoken to us.
James 5:3 You have heaped up treasure in the last
days.
1 Peter 1:5 Salvation ready to be revealed in the last
times
1 Peter 1:20 [Who] was made manifest in these last days.
2 Peter 3:3 Scoffers will come in the last days.
1 John 2:18 It is the last hour.
Jude 18 That there would be mockers in the last
time.

The Day of the Lord, God, etc.

- 2 Peter 3:12 Looking for and hastening the coming of the
day of God.
1 Thess 5:2 The day of the Lord so comes as a thief in
the night.
1 Cor. 1:8 That you may be blameless in the day of our
Lord Jesus Christ.
1 Cor. 5:5 That his spirit may be saved in the day of
our Lord Jesus Christ.

- 2 Cor. 1:14 You also are ours, in the day of the Lord Jesus.
- Acts 2:20 The great and notable day of the Lord.
- Jude 6 The judgment of the great day.
- Rom. 2:5 Treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath.

The *end of the age, the end, the last times, the last days, and the day of the Lord* were very specific references to the days between Jesus' prophecy in Matthew 24 and its fulfillment in AD 70. These were the last days of Judaism and Jerusalem. But we are not in the last days. The last days—the transition period during the death of the old covenant—are long behind us. Many don't understand that the old covenant age ended with the AD 70 destruction and that the whole New Testament speaks of that end. We are now living in the Kingdom age, which grows without end.

The baptism of the Holy Spirit, which John the Baptist prophesied, occurred on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. At that event, Peter spoke specifically about the yet-to-come baptism of fire, the destruction of Jerusalem.

*No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel [see Joel 2:28–32]: “**In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.** [The coming destruction upon Jerusalem] And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord*

will be saved” [The rest of Joel 2:32 finishes with: *“for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the LORD has said, even among the survivors whom the LORD calls.”*] (Acts 2:17–21).

In this message, Peter clearly referred to the same destructive event that Jesus spoke of in Matthew 24:29–30. Peter said the day of Pentecost was the fulfillment of this prophecy from Joel, and in the next breath, he referenced the coming destruction. In this way, Peter was saying the pouring out of the Holy Spirit was confirmation that they were in the last days, and the next thing to take place would be the destruction of Jerusalem. Then, He said all who called upon the Lord would be saved, referring not only to salvation in Jesus but also to protection from the destruction of Jerusalem for the first century Christians.

Speaking in Tongues

This brings up an amazing point about speaking in tongues. One purpose for the gift of speaking in tongues was as a prophetic sign that pointed to the coming destruction of Jerusalem. This idea might be a new concept for some readers, but the apostle Paul also confirmed this idea in First Corinthians 14:21–22:

In the Law it is written: “With other tongues and through the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people, but even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord.” [quoting from Isaiah 28:11] *Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is not for unbelievers but for believers* (1 Corinthians 14:21–22).

Here Paul quoted from Isaiah 28:11, showing that Isaiah had prophesied the coming gift of tongues. When we

read the rest of Isaiah's prophecy, we can see that he foretold not only speaking in tongues, but also apostasy, Jesus' coming, and God's judgment upon Israel. Here are the three passages from Isaiah 28 that speak about these three events:

1. Apostasy

*So then, the word of the LORD to them will become: Do this, do that, a rule for this, a rule for that; a little here, a little there—so that as they go **they will fall backward; they will be injured and snared and captured.** Therefore hear the word of the LORD, you scoffers who rule this people in Jerusalem. You boast, “We have entered into a covenant with death, with the realm of the dead we have made an agreement. When an overwhelming scourge sweeps by, it cannot touch us, for **we have made a lie our refuge and falsehood our hiding place**” (Isaiah 28:13–15).*

2. Jesus, the Chief Cornerstone

So this is what the Sovereign LORD says: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation [see Matt. 21:42]; the one who relies on it will never be stricken with panic. I will make justice the measuring line and righteousness the plumb line...” (Isaiah 28:16–17).

3. God's Judgment

“...Hail will sweep away your refuge, the lie, and water will overflow your hiding place. Your covenant with death will be annulled; your agreement with the realm of the dead will not stand. When the overwhelming scourge sweeps by, you will be beaten down by it. As often as it comes it will carry you away; morning after

morning, by day and by night, it will sweep through.” The understanding of this message will bring sheer terror (Isaiah 28:17–19).

In this extended passage from Isaiah 28, we can clearly see that the advent of the gift of speaking in tongues was a sign of the coming destruction of Jerusalem.⁴ Along these lines, regarding the gift of speaking in tongues, the scholar David Chilton writes:

The miracle of Pentecost was a shocking message to Israel. They knew what this meant. It was the sign from God that the Chief Cornerstone had come, and that Israel had rejected Him to its own damnation (Matthew 21:42–44; 1 Peter 2:6–8). It was *the sign of judgment and reprobation*, the signal that the apostates of Jerusalem were about to “stumble backward, be broken, snared, and taken captive.” [See Isa. 28:13.] The Last Days of Israel had come: the old age was at an end, and Jerusalem would be swept away in a new flood to make way for God’s New Creation. As St. Paul said, the gift of tongues was “for a sign, not to those who believe, but to unbelievers” (1 Corinthians 14:22)—*a sign to the unbelieving Jews of their approaching doom.*

The early Church looked forward to the coming of the new [Kingdom] age. They knew that, with the visible end of the Old Covenant system, the Church would be revealed as the new, true Temple; and the work Christ came to perform would be accomplished. This was an important

⁴ Although the gift of speaking in tongues pointed to the first century destruction, it continues to be relevant for personal edification and in operation with the gift of interpretation in a similar manner to prophecy. For more about tongues, see Dave Roberson’s book, *The Walk of the Spirit, the Walk of Power.*

aspect of redemption, and the first-generation Christians looked forward to this event *in their own lifetime*. During this period of waiting and severe trial, the apostle Peter assured them that they were “protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Peter 1:5). They were on the very threshold of the new world.⁵

This quote sums up the major shift between the old and new covenants that happened, beginning with Jesus’ death and resurrection and culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem. In this way, the early believers received the Kingdom in their day, and the Church has been advancing the Kingdom ever since, as we will discuss in the next chapter.

Chapter Points

- Daniel 9 prophesies the exact date of the Messiah’s arrival, the Messiah’s death, the end of the old covenant, the confirming of a new covenant, and the coming destruction of Jerusalem.
- The destruction of Jerusalem is part of Messianic prophecy.
- Jesus’ coming immersed Jerusalem in a baptism of fire.
- Jesus shook the old system and left only the unshakeable Kingdom.
- To the early Church, *the last days* meant the time before AD 70 occurred.

⁵ Chilton, *The Great Tribulation*, 45–46.

- The advent of the gift of tongues on the day of Pentecost was a confirmation of the coming destruction of Jerusalem.

Discussion Questions

1. The seventy weeks of Daniel 9 equals how many years?
2. When Jesus began His ministry at thirty years of age, how many years of the prophecy were left?
3. When Jesus was crucified after three and a half years of ministry, how many years of the prophecy were left?
4. What events finished the 490 years of the prophecy?
5. How does Matthew 18:21 tie into this prophecy?
6. What are the five main components of the Daniel 9 prophecy?
7. How was speaking in tongues a sign of the coming judgment?

Chapter 6

The Kingdom without Wrath

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Chapter 7

The New Covenant of Light

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Chapter 8

The Kingdom Now

At 4 in the morning, King Nebuchadnezzar awoke from a deep sleep. He was drenched in sweat and visibly shaken—speaking rapidly and incoherently about a dream he had just had. Clearly this was no ordinary dream. He demanded all the magicians and wizards be brought to the palace so they might help him understand the dream. He made an unusual request of them, however. The king told them he'd had a troubling dream, and he demanded the interpretation. But when the magicians asked the king to tell them the dream so they could interpret it for him, he refused. Instead, he promised he would kill all of them and destroy their households unless they both told him his dream and then interpreted it. The magicians, not surprisingly, were astounded that the king would ask such a thing. *"There is no one on earth who can do what the king asks!"* they said. *"No king, however great and mighty, has ever asked such a thing of any magician..."* (Dan. 2:10). In response to this, the king became so angry he ordered the execution of all of Babylon's magicians.

Fortunately, Daniel, one of the Hebrew captives in Babylon, who had also been trained as a magician, had tremendous wisdom and insight. By the grace of God, He was able to accurately tell the king his dream and its interpretation. King Nebuchadnezzar had dreamed about a large and dazzling statue. The head was made of gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, and its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay. As the king looked upon this statue, a large rock, *"not [cut out] by human hands"* rolled into the statue, smashing its feet of iron and clay. Successively, the iron, clay, bronze, silver, and gold all broke into pieces and blew

away, leaving no trace. However, the rock grew into an enormous mountain that filled the entire earth.

As the king and his court listened, Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar that the various metals represented various earthly kingdoms. The Babylonian Empire under Nebuchadnezzar was the pinnacle of splendor and power, the head of gold. After him would come another inferior kingdom, the silver chest and arms. A third kingdom, symbolized by the bronze belly and thighs, would then rule.

Lastly, a fourth kingdom would rise, depicted as iron because iron breaks and smashes everything, which is what this kingdom would do to all the others. The fact that the feet and toes were partly clay and partly iron indicated that the final kingdom would become a divided kingdom; it would have some of the strength of iron but also be brittle as clay. Just as iron and clay cannot be mixed, so the people of this kingdom would not be unified.

During that final, divided kingdom, God would establish a Kingdom—symbolized by the rock not cut by human hands—that would never be destroyed or left to another people. It would crush all the previous kingdoms, bringing them to an end, but it would endure forever (see Dan. 2:31–45).

In this prophetic dream, God revealed to Nebuchadnezzar *what would take place in the future*. However, it is important for us to remember that, though this reveals events in the future to the original listeners, this passage doesn't necessarily speak about *our* future. In fact, this dream clearly has been fulfilled in *our past*.

Five eras make up the statue from the dream:

- The Babylonian
- The Medeo-Persian
- The Greek

- The Roman
- The Divided Roman Empire (represented by ten toes)

King Nebuchadnezzar was the ruler of the Babylonian kingdom. After him, Daniel served under King Darius the Mede (see Dan. 6) and King Cyrus the Persian (see Dan. 10). After the Medeo-Persian kingdom came the Greek kingdom and then finally the Roman Empire, which fiercely took control of the civilized world of that day.

The fifth kingdom, which was represented by clay and iron toes in the dream, occurred when the Roman Kingdom was divided into ten provinces under Augustus Caesar, who ruled from 27 BC to AD 14. The ten provinces of the divided Roman Empire of the first century were: Italy, Achaia, Asia, Syria, Egypt, Africa, Spain, Gaul, Britain, and Germany.¹ During Augustus' rule, the ten toes were established, and then Jesus came as the rock and crashed into the toes in 3 BC.

As prophesied by this dream, during the divided Roman Empire, Jesus came and established His Kingdom as the rock that would fill the whole earth. This is consistent with other passages of Scripture where Jesus is referred to as the chief cornerstone and the rock that the builders rejected (see Luke 20:17), as well as the rock that followed the Hebrews in the wilderness (see 1 Cor. 10:4). Jesus also told Peter that on this rock (the revelation that Jesus is the Messiah) He would build His Church (see Matt. 16:18). Clearly, the rock in this dream speaks of Jesus.

His First Coming

¹ Farrar, *The Early Days of Christianity*, Vol 2, 283.

The future return of Jesus is popularly referred to as the second coming. Although it is a minor detail, I refer to that event as *the final return of Jesus* because I believe the popular phrase—*second coming*—has the numbering wrong.

Jesus' first coming was the manger in the stable at Bethlehem. His second coming was when He came back from the dead at His resurrection. His third coming was when He came in judgment upon Jerusalem in AD 70. That is why I refer to His future coming as the final return. As we just saw, Daniel 2 prophesied that Jesus would come into the earth as the rock that crushed the divided Roman Empire and that Jesus' Kingdom would begin to grow and is continuing to grow even to this very day. This naturally leads to the question: *When did Jesus' Kingdom arrive?* Was it at the manger? Was it when Jesus began His ministry at thirty years of age? Was it when He died on the cross? Was it at the AD 70 destruction of Jerusalem? Just as knowing which *coming* we are looking forward to is an important detail, so too, understanding the arrival of the Kingdom is also important.

We have seen that Caesar Augustus (27 BC–AD 14) divided Rome into ten provinces, represented in Daniel 2 as the ten toes of the statue. Daniel 2:44 says:

In the time of those kings, [The ten toes/kings] the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever.

From this we know the rock, which represents Jesus and His Kingdom, arrived during the 27 BC–AD 14 rule of

Augustus in 3 BC.² Jesus the King came in the manger at Bethlehem and brought His Kingdom with Him. Then, thirty years later, John the Baptist began to proclaim that King Jesus was about to be revealed. *“Repent the Kingdom of God is at hand”* (Matt. 3:2).

As Jesus ministered for three and a half years, His constant theme was teaching and demonstrating what it looks like to be in His Kingdom. During the Last Supper, Jesus stood and said, *“This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins”* (Matt. 26:28). This was a confirmation of His Kingdom being transferred to His followers as they transitioned from the old covenant into the new covenant.

At His death on the cross, He declared, *“It is finished!”* (John 19:30). In the eyes of God, through the removal of the need for old covenant animal sacrifice, this was the end of the age of Moses and the inauguration of the Kingdom of Jesus. Though the Jews continued the Temple practices after the death of Jesus, it had no value in the eyes of God.

Even after His resurrection, Jesus used much of His precious time to continue training His ambassadors about the Kingdom they had just inherited:

After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3).

Jesus’ birth, ministry, Last Supper, death, resurrection, and ascension message all centered on the removal of the old covenant and the inauguration of the new covenant. Jesus is the rock of Daniel 2, and He has established His

² Jesus was technically born in 3 BC, not in AD 0; our calendars are slightly off.

Kingdom in the earth. This Kingdom is founded on the new covenant of forgiveness (see Matt. 26:28; Heb. 8:8–12) rather than the old covenant of blessings and curses (see Deut. 28).

Jesus declared that His Kingdom had come as the smallest seed and would grow to be the largest tree in the garden, that it came as a measure of yeast and would work its way through the whole loaf (see Matt. 13:31–33). Some have taught Jesus' Kingdom will someday arrive in the future and be established all at once with complete dominion, yet Jesus taught His Kingdom would be established gradually.

According to God, what Jesus accomplished on the cross removed the need for the old sacrificial system. The Father went so far as to rip the veil in the Temple, revealing that the Ark of the Covenant was no longer there and that the old system had been superseded. Yet between AD 30 and AD 70, the Jewish non-Christians carried on with the old covenant ways in the Temple. To the Father God, who had just laid down His only Son as the perfect lamb sacrifice, this was an obstinate abomination. The apostle John even refers to those Jews as the synagogue of Satan (see Rev 2:9; 3:9).

Likewise, the author of Hebrews refers to the old covenant system as "*obsolete and outdated* [because of the Cross] *and will soon fade away* [because the AD 70 destruction, which would completely destroy Jerusalem, the Temple, the Jews as a nation, and the priesthood]" (Heb. 8:13).

The Kingdom came in the manger, was proclaimed by John the Baptist, was explained and demonstrated by Jesus, was confirmed in the covenant of forgiveness at the Last Supper, was established more fully by the finishing of the old covenant on the cross, and was passed on to the apostolic ambassadors before Jesus' ascension. Then it

grew throughout the Book of Acts to reach the entire inhabited and civilized world before the AD 70 destruction removed the old covenant ways entirely.

At our time in history, the Kingdom is here and now; it has been here for two thousand years, and it is growing and will continue to grow.

Chapter Points

- Jesus is the Rock that crashed into the Roman Empire in the first century.
- His Kingdom was established at His first coming, not at a future coming.
- His Kingdom will continue to grow without end (see Isa. 9:7).

Discussion Questions

1. What four kingdoms were prophesied in the statue of Daniel 2?
2. Who is the rock cut out of the mountain?
3. What did the ten toes of the statue represent?
4. Was the kingdom established at Jesus first coming, or are we waiting for it to be established at His second coming? Explain.

Part 3

The FUTURE when Heaven Fills Earth

Chapter 9

The Persecution Mindset

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Chapter 10

The Kingdom Advancing

As we saw in chapter 8, “The Kingdom Now,” some people believe the Kingdom will arrive all at once in the future. They say God’s Kingdom will instantly triumph over all the powers of the devil when it finally appears. This idea comes from thinking we are currently in the so-called Church age. However, as we have seen, the Kingdom arrived with the King in 3 BC. With that foundation, in this chapter we will look at the nature of this gradually advancing and ever-increasing Kingdom.

The Ever-Increasing Kingdom

Jesus came to set up His Kingdom, and He said it would continually grow. He used these two analogies to describe this aspect of the Kingdom:

The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed planted in a field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but it becomes the largest of garden plants; it grows into a tree, and birds come and make nests in its branches (see Matt. 13:31–32).

The Kingdom of Heaven is like the yeast a woman uses in making bread. Even though she puts only a little yeast in three measures of flour, it permeates every part of the dough (see Matt. 13:33).

Daniel 2:44, which we discussed in chapter 8, describes the Kingdom this way:

In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all

those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever.

This verse is reminiscent of Isaiah 9:7, which says, “*Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end...*” (Isa. 9:7 NKJV). The nature of the Kingdom of God is ever progressing—always expanding, never retreating, and continually growing. Take, for example, the following five progressive statements from Scripture. The Word says that we move from:

1. Brighter to Brighter

The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day (Proverbs 4:18 NIV).

2. Grace to Grace

And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace (John 1:16 NKJV).

3. Strength to Strength

They go from strength to strength... (Psalm 84:7 NKJV).

4. Faith to Faith

For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith” (Romans 1:17 NKJV).

5. Glory to Glory

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord (2 Corinthians 3:18 NKJV).

According to these verses, we can accurately say the Church is currently walking in the greatest brightness, grace, strength, faith, and glory it ever has. This is very

hard for some to accept, but it is true. Jesus set in motion a Kingdom that is still progressing and being established more and more each day. It will continue to progress until it has fulfilled the following verses:

...For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11:9 NKJV).

For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea (Habakkuk 2:14 NKJV).

But truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD (Numbers 14:21 NKJV).

As I have already noted, it is very important to understand that Jesus set up His Kingdom upon His first visit. Many have been taught that Jesus set up the Church age and that we are not currently living in the Kingdom age, but that the Church age continues until Jesus' return, at which point He will initiate the Kingdom age. Scripture does not support this point of view; Jesus clearly brought His Kingdom (see Matt. 4:17) and sent His disciples to preach the gospel of the Kingdom (see Matt. 10:7), not the gospel of the Church age. The whole concept of a Church age cannot be found in Scripture. The Kingdom arrived in the first century when *the rock cut without hands*, Jesus, crashed into the Roman Empire, and it has been growing ever since.

Many who don't understand that Jesus and His Kingdom (as established during the first century) are "*the rock cut without hands*" from Nebuchadnezzar's dream also believe the Roman Empire has to be rebuilt so that Jesus can crash into it *in the future* in order to set up His Kingdom. Fortunately, this has already been accomplished. Jesus completely fulfilled Daniel 2 in the

first century, and there is no reason to revive the Roman Empire so that Jesus can fulfill this prophecy twice!

What of the “Remnant”?

We have established that the Kingdom that Jesus set up is progressing and advancing all the time. The next question that typically arises is about remnant theology. In the Old Testament, we observe a pattern of the “faithful remnant.” In other words, often only a minority of a group of people was actually faithful to God. For example, out of all the people on the face of the earth, only eight survived the flood on Noah’s ark (see Gen. 8). Out of all of Gideon’s men, only 300 fought in the battle (see Judg. 7). Out of all the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, only Lot and his daughters survived (see Gen. 19). This is a common pattern in the Old Testament.

Many people have carried the idea of the remnant over from the Old Testament into the New Testament, yet this is not the nature of the Kingdom. Rather, the remnant concept is reversed in the Kingdom of God. Under Jesus, out of twelve disciples, He only lost one, Judas (see John 17:12). The Kingdom starts as a seed and grows to the biggest tree; it starts as a little leaven and works through the whole loaf (see Matt. 13:31–33); it starts as a stone cut without hands and grows into a mountain that fills the whole earth (see Dan. 2:35). The Kingdom of Jesus is the opposite of remnant theology.

The New Testament holds no room for remnant thinking. This type of defeatist thinking, which sees only a portion of the whole Church as good, needs to be set aside with animal sacrifice and certain other Old Testament realities that are no longer valid.

A Historical Perspective

Many Christians have a hard time viewing the future optimistically because they have a lack of perspective regarding the past. When they look back, they think they are seeing “the good ol’ days.” But if we look closer at history, we see that God’s Kingdom has, in fact, been steadily progressing forward. To do this, we need a different perspective. We know what life is like today; let’s compare it to the conditions of society in the past. Harold Eberle, in his book, *Christianity Unshackled*, compares the statistics of past times to our present day. In this section, I rely heavily on his research.

The Early 1800s

First, let’s look at what life was like in the United States 200 years ago—in the early 1800s. At that time, the population was slightly over 5 million, but 20 percent of those people were slaves (that’s more than 1 million slaves). Abortion was legal during most of the nineteenth century, and according to the records, one fifth of all pregnancies were aborted (Michigan had the highest rate at 34 percent). Also, in many states, the age of sexual consent was as low as nine or ten years old, and prostitution was commonplace. New York City estimated having a ratio of one prostitute to every sixty-four men, and Savannah estimated a ratio of one to thirty-nine.

This was also the time of the pioneers and covered wagon trains heading west. Thousands relocated to the wild west looking for gold and a fresh start. When gold was discovered, the gold rushes created the most despicable and dangerous of communities. In fact, throughout the West, murder was so common that most people carried a gun for protection. Even in safer frontier communities, no organized churches were formed until years after settlements had been established. At the same time, tens of thousands of American Indians were murdered or forced

from their lands, and thousands of Chinese people were imported on the western coast as slaves.

During that time period, women had virtually no rights. Not only were women not allowed to vote, but their husbands were legally allowed to beat them as long as they avoided maiming or killing them. Also, alcoholism occurred at a much higher rate than it does today.

Although some godly people were laying the foundations for the United States government and other good things were happening, from these simple statistics, we can plainly see that morally, ethically, and spiritually the climate of the U.S. was far worse than it is today.

The Time of Jesus' Childhood

Looking even farther back in time, let's examine the climate of the whole world approximately 2,000 years ago—the time when Jesus was a child. As we know, the Roman Empire ruled the world, with its primary cultural centers being in Europe, the Middle East, and Northern Africa. Throughout the empire, slavery was commonplace—to the point that in Italy, the hub of the empire, about 40 percent of the population was in slavery. Homosexuality was also the norm, especially between masters and slaves. Also, many babies were killed after birth because of being deformed or sickly or even simply female.

Obviously, at that time, since Jesus was still a child, the gospel had not yet arrived on the scene. The Jews had a revelation of God, yet they lived in disobedience, and it had been 400 years since a prophet had spoken on God's behalf. Rather, most people worshipped a multitude of cruel and capricious gods, including Jupiter, Juno, and Neptune. Temple prostitution and ritual child sacrifice were a regular part of this religious system. This was also the era of the gladiators, and in the Roman arenas, people were

regularly tortured to death or mauled by wild animals. Later, under Nero, this fate befell many of the early Christians. It is hard for us to understand, but the philosophers that Western society so praises—Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates—saw nothing wrong with these practices.

Ernest Hampden Cook, in his book *The Christ Has Come*, wrote:

The fact is that bad as the world still is, yet morally it is vastly better than it was when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea.... Few people in these days have an adequate conception of the misery and degradation which were then the common lot of almost all mankind, owing the monstrous wickedness of the times, to continual wars, to the cruelties of political despotism, and of everywhere-prevailing slavery.

Outside of the Roman Empire, things were no better. In Africa, Asia, and Australia, people worshipped nature, demons, and their deceased ancestors. In North America, the American Indians had many forms of worship, and in South America, tens of thousands of people were regularly sacrificed to a bloodthirsty god. Yet throughout the whole world, no one knew the Messiah.¹

Truly, as we can see from this brief overview, the world was lost in darkness beyond what most of us can even imagine. This is what the apostle Paul meant when he wrote, “...formerly you, the Gentiles...were at that time

¹ Ernest Hampden Cook, *The Christ Has Come*, xvi.

separated from Christ...having no hope and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:11–12).”²

Today

By comparison, let’s examine the world today. The gospel is reaching even the remotest places in the world, and Christianity is experiencing phenomenal growth globally. In fact, worldwide, more than 80,000 people are being born again daily. That adds up to more than a half million people who are becoming Christians every week. The tiny seed that came into the earth in that little nation of Israel has grown to permeate the earth. Christianity is, in fact, the largest, most influential force of humanity in the world today.

Certainly, I am not saying our world is perfect or that global peace and utopia are just around the corner. Until Jesus’ return, the struggle between light and dark will continue. Difficult times of war, famine, disease, and poverty may yet happen in the future, and during such times, people are often capable of the most inhumane acts. I am not denying the reality that life is sometimes tragic and excruciatingly painful. But I also want to highlight the definite reality that, though it is not anywhere near perfect living here on earth, it is consistently becoming morally, ethically, and spiritually better. We must be watchful and hard at work, for we still have much to accomplish before Christ’s return, but we must do this with the understanding that we are gaining ground, not losing it. The increase of God’s government and peace is truly without end.

Many of you may have been stretched by the historical facts that you just read. You may need to read it a few more times to grasp the shift in thinking required of you. But

² The historical data in the two sections prior is paraphrased from Eberle, *Christianity Unshackled*, 264–267.

when you are ready to be stretched some more, here are some additional enlightening statistics.

Status Update

The number of Christians around the world has nearly quadrupled in the last 100 years, from about 600 million in 1910 to more than 2.3 billion as of 2011, representing 33 percent of the world population.³

In his book *Mega Shift, Igniting Spiritual Power*, author James Rutz points out that when the Spirit was first poured out on the early Church, 3,000 people were saved in one day. That was amazing. Back then, it was a huge number. However, today approximately 3,000 people get saved, somewhere in the world, every 54 minutes! The math is almost overwhelming. He further states that until 1960, western evangelicals outnumbered non-Western (Latino, black, and Asian) evangelicals two to one. In 2000, non-western evangelicals had surpassed westerners four to one.

According to Rutz, often these numbers happen though large events, such as the crusade that Reinhard Bonnke held in Lagos, Nigeria, in November 2000. During those six days and nights, almost 6 million people attended, and 3.4 million registered decisions to follow Christ, over 1 million of them being on the final night. One important element of such events is the widespread healing of all kinds of physical deformities, diseases, and illnesses through the power of the Holy Spirit. At Bonnke's Nigeria event, over 1,000 physicians were present to examine people and confirm healings. Bonnke also had 30,000 ushers and spent the six months prior training 200,000 counselors to assist the many converts.

³ George Weigel, "Christian Number-Crunching Reveals Impressive Growth" (2011), *Catholic Education Resource Center*, www.catholiceducation.org/articles/facts/fm0146.htm.

Such massive influxes of new believers are not isolated events but are becoming increasingly common occurrences. Some have even estimated the advent of a billion new converts within ten years.

Rutz goes on to say:

From our vantage point in North America and Europe, where church membership is going nowhere, this sounds like a cooked-up fantasy, but it is true. This is the biggest mega shift in history. Can you think of any time when over a billion people eagerly changed their lives and loyalties in one generation?" Looking at the statistics, we can clearly see that, if growth continues at this rate, whole nations will experience transformation on all levels. In fact, as Rutz predicts, "We are in the early stages of a total transformation of our planet."⁴

Christianity today—unlike a century ago—is truly a global faith. Here are the stats to prove it. Since 1900, the number of Latin American Christians has grown by an incredible 877 percent. Three of the top ten countries in Christian population are in the Americas (the United States, Brazil, and Mexico). Two are in Europe (Russia and Germany), two are in the Asia-Pacific region (the Philippines and China), and three are in sub-Saharan Africa (Nigeria, DR Congo, and Ethiopia), reflecting Christianity's global reach.⁵ Christians are so far-flung and geographically widespread, in fact, that no single continent

⁴ James Rutz, *Mega Shift*, 25–27.

⁵ Weigel, "Christian Number-Crunching Reveals Impressive Growth."

or region can indisputably claim to be the center of global Christianity.⁶

A century ago, this was not the case. In 1910, about two-thirds of the world's Christians lived in Europe, where the bulk of Christians had been for a millennium, according to historical estimates by the Center for the Study of Global Christianity.⁷ Today, while about a quarter of all Christians live in Europe (26 percent) and more than a third now live in the Americas (37 percent); about one in every four Christians lives in sub-Saharan Africa (24 percent) and about one-in-eight is found in Asia and the Pacific (13 percent).⁸

Africa, where there were relatively few Christians at the beginning of the twentieth century, has been the most stunning area of Christian growth over the past century. The Christian population in sub-Saharan Africa climbed from 9 percent in 1910 to 63 percent in 2010, or from 8.5 million to 516 million. The number of Christians in the Asia-Pacific region also jumped from 27 million in 1910 to 285 million in 2010. Most remarkably, in 1950 China had 1 million believers, but by 1980, it had 40 million, and by 2010, it had 75 million.⁹

Another astonishing growth spurt, measured typologically, has been among Pentecostals and charismatics—from 981,000 in 1900 to 612 million in 2011. With an average of 37,000 new adherents every day,

⁶ “Global Christianity: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World’s Christian Population” (Dec. 19, 2011), *The Pew Foundation*, www.pewforum.org/Christian/Global-Christianity-exec.aspx.

⁷ Center for the Study of Global Christianity, <http://www.gordonconwell.edu/resources/CSGC-Resources.cfm>.

⁸ “Global Christianity...”

⁹ Ibid.

it is the fastest-growing group of Christians in the two millennia of Christian history.¹⁰

The point of these statistics is clear. The “good ol’ days” were not as good as many of us have assumed they were. When we remove our romanticized lenses in order to see what really was, as well as what really is happening *now*, we can clearly see that God’s Kingdom is markedly advancing.

What’s Left?

After reading the contents of this book thus far, many will likely make the exclamation, “Then what’s left?!” That is the natural response when a person finds out the Great Tribulation has already happened, there is no one-world ruler coming to take over, and there is no secret rapture. For some who have made the endtimes the major focus of their Christian walk, if they have come to agree with the contents of this book, it is likely that their theology has been shaken as if by an earthquake.

Many may feel like they are losing a major portion of the New Testament—which they thought related to them personally—when they find out it had a historical and prophetic fulfillment. This would be the wrong assessment. We don’t lose any of the 360 Old Testament messianic prophecies that Jesus fulfilled; in fact, these fulfillments build our faith and knowledge of the Word. To realize that Matthew 24 has occurred does not mean that we lose Scripture; it means that we can affirm how amazing of a prophet Jesus is! Everything that He said would happen within a generation (forty years) did happen within that generation (forty years). Once people find out there is no

¹⁰ Weigel, “Christian Number-Crunching Reveals Impressive Growth.”

future Tribulation or antichrist, they shouldn't feel loss; they should be rejoicing because of what they lost!

Discovering the optimistic view of the endtimes is one of the most exciting and wonderful bits of news the modern Christian can hear. The inability to receive this as good news often arises from an unhealthy place in the hearts of individuals, especially the ones who want to see God rain down judgment upon their surroundings. Many will not receive this book as good news because they, like James and John, want to see the destruction of sinners, yet Jesus would say, "*You know not what spirit you are of*" (Luke 9:55).

The Kingdom and the Church

Although a lot of the passages that are taught as future are actually past, many passages of Scripture do remain to be fulfilled. These passages mainly fall into two categories: The Kingdom of God and the Church.

I define the Kingdom of God as His ruler-ship, in other words, the King's domain (i.e. King-dom). Therefore, the Kingdom is God's sphere of ruler-ship. Jesus taught that the Kingdom of God is growing and expanding (see Matt. 13:31–33; Isa. 9:7), that God's ruler-ship is ever increasing from glory to glory. The primary way the Kingdom grows is through God's representatives in the earth, His Church. Jesus placed the keys of the Kingdom into the hands of Peter as the representative of the Church (see Matt. 16:18–19). Therefore, the Church in the earth is working as God's representatives to expand and increase the Kingdom and see His government grow without end—the ultimate end being that it would be on earth as it is in Heaven (see Matt. 6:10).

With this understanding, let's examine a few passages that remain to be fulfilled, first about the Kingdom and then regarding the Church.

The Kingdom

In Luke 19, Jesus told a parable:

*He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, **Occupy till I come** (Luke 19:12–13 KJV).*

Jesus is the one who went to a far country (Heaven) to receive for Himself a Kingdom, and He will someday return. When Jesus left, He put stewardship into the hands of His servants (the Church). To *occupy* is to aggressively expand. The servants took the finances they were given and multiplied them. We are called to occupy the Kingdom, to advance it in the earth, to be a part of its growth from glory to glory. *We are to occupy until He comes, not be pre-occupied with His coming.* The Kingdom of God started growing at Jesus first coming and will continue to grow until it culminates in His final return (see Isa. 9:7). As Jesus put it in another parable:

*The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but **when it is grown**, it is the greatest among herbs, and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof. Another parable spoke he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, **till the whole was leavened** (Matthew 13:31–33 KJV).*

The point is this: The Kingdom will continue to grow until His glory and knowledge fill the whole earth. As Isaiah prophesied, “...*For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea*” (Isa. 11:9). Likewise, Habakkuk said, “*For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea*” (Hab. 2:14). This is the end goal—the complete filling of the earth with the knowledge and glory of God.

Currently, Jesus is sitting on the throne, waiting until all His enemies are made into His footstool, as the following passages make clear:

*When the Lord Jesus had finished talking with them, he was taken up into heaven **and sat down** at God’s right hand* (Mark 16:19 TLB).

*But when this Priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, He sat down at the right hand of God. **Since that time He waits** for His enemies to be made His footstool* (Hebrews 10:12–13).

*Then the end will come, when He hands over the kingdom to God the Father after He has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For He must reign until He has **put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death*** (1 Corinthians 15:24–26).

Jesus has been sitting at the right hand of God for two thousand years, waiting while His Church builds Him a divine ottoman of sorts. The assignment of the Church for the last two thousand years has been to crush satan under our feet—“*The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet*” (Rom. 16:20a)—and thus put Jesus’ enemies under His feet. As His delegated authorities, by crushing satan under our feet, we are placing him under Jesus’ feet. In other words, we are part of a progressive destruction of

the demonic kingdom, which will continue until death, the final enemy, is destroyed.

The ultimate goal is that His “*Kingdom would come*” and His “*will be done on earth as it is in heaven*” (Matt. 6:10). The signs of the times that Jesus listed in Matthew 24 were only in reference to AD 70; therefore, the true signs we can be looking for in these days are the evidence of the growth of His Kingdom within the earth.

The Church

The Scriptures also contain several prophecies about the Church that are yet unfulfilled. Here I will cover three aspects of the Church’s destiny we have to work toward and look forward to—our calling to walk in unity, to be a mature body for Christ, and to produce the sons of God.

1. The Church in Unity

Jesus’ famous prayer for unity in the Church is recorded in John 17:

*That they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be **one in Us**, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, **that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one**, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me* (John 17:21–23 NASB).

The apostle Paul also echoed Jesus’ call for unity in his description of the fivefold ministry:

*So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up **until** we all reach **unity in***

the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:11–13).

According to David B. Barrett's *World Christian Encyclopedia*, there are 33,830 Christian denominations in the world today.¹¹ I would say we have not reached "*unity in the faith*."

One of the largest hindrances to arriving at the unity of the faith is an expectancy of the "last days apostasy." If a church believes there must be a massive falling away from the faith, then that church avoids partnering with other ministries for fear of contamination. Also, if a church believes the one-world ruler will come and take over a one-world government and a one-world religion, then all progress toward unity is seen as a supposed "sign of the end." Yet, here we have two very clear passages regarding the Church walking in unity. I am not sure what this will look like, but I believe it still is in our future.

2. The Church Grows to Carry the Head

Connected to the mandate of unity is the promise that the Church will mature into a fitting body for Christ as the head:

*And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: **Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect [complete] man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ** (Ephesians 4:11–13).*

¹¹ Barrett, et al., *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 236.

In the New Testament, the physical body is used as a metaphor to explain the relationship between Christ and His Church. The writers referred to Christ as the head and the Church as His body. The above passage from Ephesians makes reference to this metaphor and declares that the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers are working toward the goal that the body of Christ would be “perfect” and the “measure of the stature of Christ.”

Essentially, this is saying that Jesus’ body will someday match His head. Jesus is not going to come back for a weak and sickly body to attach to His head. The body of Christ will continue to grow and mature, to become healthy and strong, and then Jesus will have a body that is capable of carrying His head.

3. The Church Brings Forth the Sons of God

The term *sons of God* applies to all who are God’s children, both male and female. We are the sons of God, and we have a crucial role to fulfill in relation to creation. As the apostle Paul wrote:

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the One who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God (Romans 8:18–21).

When we see earthquakes, tsunamis, tornados, wildfires, floods, and many other natural disasters, I believe this is the most important passage to keep in view. Rather than immediately asking, “*What sin is God judging?*” or “*What gave the devil access to bring such destruction?*”

or simply concluding (wrongly), “*It must be a sign of the times,*” we can find a better understanding of what is taking place in the earth through this passage. The earth is *subjected to frustration*. Romans 8:22 says that “*the whole earth groans*” (NKJV). And it is the children of God who are meant to bring it into glorious freedom.

I believe the children of God will continue to grow into a greater understanding of their identity, which will result in them living in glorious freedom in a way that has not yet been experienced. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom! (See 2 Corinthians 3:17.) Someday in the future, the heart of the Church will be filled with glorious freedom, and this will impact the entire planet!

Chapter Points

- Remnant theology is not valid in the New Testament; instead, we have an ever-advancing Kingdom of God.
- The Bible contains some promises regarding the Church and the Kingdom that are yet to be fulfilled.
- We are to occupy until He comes, not be preoccupied with His coming.
- The Kingdom will continue to grow until the knowledge of God and His glory fill the whole earth.
- All of Jesus’ enemies will be made His footstool prior to His return. The Church enacts this as His delegated authorities on earth.
- The true sign of the times is when we see His Kingdom coming and His will being done on earth as it is in Heaven.
- True unity in the Church is a promise that has not yet been fulfilled, but will be before Christ’s return.

- Before Christ's return, the Church will mature into a *body* that is capable of carrying its *head*—Christ.
- The Church will bring forth the *sons of God*, who will help release freedom to the earth prior to Christ's return.

Discussion Questions

1. Does the Kingdom come at the end of time, or is it present and growing?
2. How is this different than what you grew up believing?
3. What is remnant teaching? What fruit have you seen from this teaching?
4. Is remnant teaching compatible with Kingdom teaching? Why or why not?
5. How did you feel when you read about the tremendous advancement of the Kingdom?

Chapter 11

The Return, Resurrection, and Final Judgment

I get asked the same question very often: “If there is no future Great Tribulation and no antichrist, then do you believe in the return of Jesus Christ?”

The answer is, *absolutely yes!* Jesus will return to earth in the future.

I have come to understand that a lot of verses that speak of Jesus coming on the clouds of heaven are actually about the AD 70 destruction of Jerusalem. Yet a significant number of verses still speak about events in our future. Although I believe a majority of Bible prophecy has been fulfilled, I still see three major prophetic events as remaining unfulfilled. I refer to these as *The Big Three*: the physical return of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, and the final judgment.

What you have read in this book stands in total agreement, not only with the Scripture, but also with the historical creeds of the Church. The early Church leaders gathered in Nicaea in AD 325, and once they reached a consensus, they wrote the Nicene Creed. We see in the creed that they believed in a physical, future return of Jesus to earth.

The Nicene Creed

Here’s the creed in full:

We believe in one God the Father Almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things
visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father by whom all things were made; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man, and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried, and the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father. *And he shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead*, whose kingdom shall have no end.

And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceeded from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets. And we believe one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins. *And we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.*¹ Amen.

We see three things in this one sentence that I've highlighted: He shall come again, He shall judge, and His judgment will be of the quick (living) and the dead (which refers to resurrection). These are the three things that those in AD 325 believed were future unfulfilled events.

The Return of Christ

¹ "The Nicene Creed," <http://www.creeds.net/ancient/nicene.htm>.

Although Jesus used the Hebrew phrase *coming upon clouds* in reference to the destruction that God brought on Jerusalem in AD 70, Jesus also prophesied that He would physically return one day in the future. The majority of the New Testament verses about Jesus' coming are about the AD 70 destruction. Keep in mind that Jews in AD 30 were much more focused on the immediate destruction of the Temple, the end of sacrifice, and the removal of the Holy City. The idea that Jesus would return physically someday in the future was not their major focus. The early Church's thoughts were more consumed with surviving the Jewish persecution and looking forward to Christ's coming to punish their persecutors.

Yet, several passages do speak of Jesus' future, physical return to earth. Here are some of the main passages:

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:9–11).

So Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him (Hebrews 9:28).

While we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13).

At His return, the following two events will occur: the resurrection of the dead and the final judgment.

The Resurrection of the Dead

Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned (John 5:28–29).

A time is coming—it is still in our future—when all graves will be emptied out and the dead will be sorted into two different categories: the good and the evil, those who will live and those who will be condemned. This is typically called the final judgment; I will address that more in the next section. For now, simply notice that the resurrection occurs first, then the sorting. In the next two passages, we can see more detail regarding what happens to the believers when they are resurrected for the sorting.

Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first (1 Thessalonians 4:13,16).

When the Lord speaks and blows His trumpet, the dead in Christ will rise first. The apostle Paul gives us more details in this next passage:

So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body....

I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” (1 Corinthians 15:42–44, 50–55).

Believers will become immortal, and we will have imperishable bodies. This is likely similar to what happened to Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration or after His resurrection. The dead in Christ will be changed in the twinkling of an eye (really fast). Death will be swallowed up in victory.

Now we will look at the third event of the Big Three.

The Final Judgment

Many verses throughout the New Testament clearly teach about the final judgment, including these words from Jesus:

And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man. Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who

have done what is evil will rise to be condemned (John 5:27–29).

Here we can clearly see that Jesus has been given the authority to be the judge. Paul confirmed this in his speech to the people of Athens:

“For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.” When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, “We want to hear you again on this subject” (Acts 17:31–32).

This is an affirmation that Jesus will be the judge, but it also says that the *proof* that Jesus is God is in the fact that He was raised from the dead. This final judgment will happen when Jesus comes in His glory:

*When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations [ethnos] will be gathered before him, and **he will separate the people** [individuals] **one from another** as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left....Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life* (Matthew 25:31–33,46).

Jesus *coming in His glory* is different than the Hebrew idiom *coming in clouds*, which is a reference to the destruction of a nation or city. When Jesus *comes in His glory*, it will be as a judge on the throne, bringing the final judgment.

It is important, also, to notice that Jesus is not talking about judging the character of nations in Matthew 25. The phrase *all nations* indicates that everyone will be gathered before Him, but the judge clearly separates *the people*, the

individuals. Some have created strange doctrines on the idea that God will separate “sheep and goat nations,” but that is not stated in any passage of Scripture. This is about separating individuals. Individuals are personally accountable before God, not nations. If we read Matthew 25 closely, we will see that the sheep and goat nations teaching is not supported by this passage. Here are five thoughts about the sheep and goat nations teaching:

1. Yes, it is our mission to disciple the nations (see Matt. 28:19).
2. Yes, this mission will be successful (see Rev. 11:15).
3. No, Christian nations are not considered “sheep nations.” Matthew 25 uses the Greek word *ethnos* in reference to the nations. That means it is referring to individuals of all ethnicities, not citizenship.
4. Yes, we are to pray that we would inherit the nations (see Ps. 2:8). Again here *nations* is the same root word as *ethnicities*. God is not looking for sheep countries; He is looking for all ethnicities to be discipled so He has countries full of sheep individuals.
5. Some might say to me, “Why does this matter? Aren’t you splitting hairs on this?” This is why it matters. For many years, I have heard “prophetic” teachers speak of our nation as a “sheep nation,” warning that we must stay the course or else we might become a “goat nation.” This led me to think through the implications of this teaching:
 - How does one become a goat nation? Does this require 51 percent being non-Christian?
 - What if the population is 51 percent Christian? Are we then a sheep nation?

- What denominations count toward the 51 percent needed to keep us a sheep nation?
- What if you are a sheep living in a goat nation? What happens to you on judgment day?
- If I am a Christian in a goat nation on judgment day, will God send me to hell? (Of course, I would assume that none of these preachers would say so, but if judgment is national—not individual—then how could they disagree?)
- If judgment day is based on national citizenship, should I get citizenship in multiple countries and be better prepared for God’s national sheep/goat “roulette” on judgment day?

My conclusion about the sheep and goat nations teaching is that God is no respecter of country borderlines. His new covenant (see Heb. 8) has nothing to do with countries and neither does judgment day. Judgment day will be individuals standing before God as individuals. It does not matter what country we live in. Of course, the well-intentioned goal of those teaching about the sheep and goat nations is that we are called to disciple all nations, which I agree with.

We can find further confirmation for individual (not national) judgment in the following passage:

If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person’s work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames (1 Corinthians 3:12–15).

The final judgment will divide righteous people from evil people, and the evil will receive their punishment. Yet the righteous will also receive varying rewards. Christians typically don't like to talk about being rewarded, but Jesus and the early Church had no qualms about rewards. In this passage, Paul spoke of the rewarding of Christians at the final judgment. In fact, it seems like, according to Paul, this is something that should be on our minds.

At the final judgment, all humankind will be resurrected and appear before the throne of God. Then individuals will be sorted out as good or evil, sheep or goats. Then the good, righteous sheep will have a further judgment, which is to examine them for reward. This is pictured as each individual having a large pile of wood, hay, and straw piled in front of them, as well as gold, silver, and jewels mixed into the pile. I picture each believer standing by a pile, which represents his or her life; then a runner with a torch comes and begins to set fire to each person's pile. As the pile burns, all the wasted time in one's life burns as the wood, hay, and straw. Then finally the fire burns out, the pile is gone, and all that remains is a smaller pile of ash. Among the ash is gold, silver, and jewels. These represent the rewards.

Some teach that every sinful action in a Christian's life will be projected on a giant screen in Heaven for all to see; then God will forgive that Christian, allowing admission into Heaven. This is an evil and foolish teaching that promotes shame to try to stop Christians from sinning. According to the Bible, God has forgiven us, and He chooses to remember our sins no more (see Heb. 8:12; 10:17). This idea of judgment comes from the dark ages, not from the Bible. There is a judgment for Christians, but not for shame and guilt over sins that God has already forgiven and doesn't even remember. The only reason to judge Christians is to dole out the varying rewards.

*Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart. **At that time each will receive their praise from God** (1 Corinthians 4:5).*

This judgment is not a matter of salvation; it is a matter of how much praise or how little praise one will receive. As Paul wrote in another place,

You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat...so then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God (Romans 14:10,12).

Again, this accounting is about reward, not about shame and punishment. Although there won't be much praise for some Christians who stand before His throne, this is not about shame and punishment. Of course, it would be better to live a life that God can praise and reward with gold, silver, and jewels rather than a life that will burn up leaving nothing but a pile of ash.

When most people think of the final judgment, this is the passage that comes to mind:

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done. Then death and Hades were

thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11-15).

This is a very descriptive passage and gives more detail to the picture of judgment, while basically encapsulating the previously examined passages. Simply stated, one day Jesus will return in glory with His angels and bring judgment based on whose names are and are not written in the Lamb's book of life. Those who are not in the book of life will be thrown into the lake of fire. Those who are in the book of life will then have their lives burned down as wood, hay, and straw or silver, gold and jewels. Then each Christian will receive their due praise from God. This is what will take place in the future and directs how we should choose to live.

Chapter Points

- There are yet three major prophetic events remaining to be fulfilled: the physical return of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, and the final judgment.
- In the future, when Christ returns, all the dead will be resurrected for judgment. After their resurrection, the good and evil people will be sorted.
- At the resurrection of the dead, believers will receive imperishable bodies.
- Jesus will be the judge at the final judgment, and He will judge individuals, not nations.
- At the judgment, evil people (unbelievers) will receive punishment and righteous people (Christians) will receive rewards.

- Christians will be rewarded based on how they lived their lives for the Kingdom. However, God forgives all who repent, even those whose lives receive little or no reward. His purpose in this is not humiliation or condemnation, and our sins will not be projected on a screen for all to see.

Discussion Questions

1. Does the Bible teach a future return of Jesus?
2. Does Church history affirm this? Does Jonathan Welton affirm this?
3. When Jesus returns, what two other major events will occur?
4. Have you heard the sheep and goats *as nations* teaching?
5. Have you understood the sheep and goats *as individuals*? Which makes sense and why?

Chapter 12

The Rapture

I used to be a counselor at an all-male Christian summer camp. The greatest prank of all time was the year when we raptured everyone! Well, not really, but that was the goal. As staffers, we had schemed and plotted that if the Camp Director ever left the campground long enough, the counselors would take the campers into the woods and stage an elaborate rapture prank.

When the Director returned to the camp, he would see random clothes littered about the soccer field, swimming trunks floating by themselves in the pool, a random camper sitting in the grass crying about how all his bunkmates had disappeared in the rapture, and so forth. Although this would have been epic, we never managed to pull it off during the six summers I was on staff. Every summer the idea would resurface, but it never came to fruition.

It was about this same time that I began studying the history of the modern view of the endtimes. As I did, I learned that the whole concept of the rapture, as it is commonly taught, cannot be found in Church history before the 1800s and that it comes from a few deeply misunderstood Scriptures.

The Rapture

The concept of the rapture is that on any day in the future, Jesus will secretly snatch away His followers to Heaven. This will be followed by the antichrist rising and seizing rule of the entire planet. He will rule from a revived Roman Empire and sit on a throne inside a rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem (some hold the view that the rapture will happen halfway through the antichrist's seven year rule).

Then God will pour out His wrath upon the wicked in the earth, finally culminating in what will be called the battle of Armageddon. Essentially, none of these teachings were widely taught before the 1830s.

Four main passages are used to teach the rapture concept. I will examine them one at a time.

Passage #1: 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18

Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words (1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 NIV).

The Thessalonian church was a church surviving under tremendous persecution. We see this in Paul's encouragement to them: "*Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring*" (2 Thess. 1:4). Because of this persecution, many of their members had been put to death. This is the context in which Paul

wrote First Thessalonians. Paul did not hint in any way that a coming Great Tribulation, under the one-world ruler called the antichrist, must be avoided and that God would rapture Christians two thousand years after he wrote this letter. In fact, he made it clear that he was writing words of clarification and comfort, for his first-century readers, regarding what would happen to those who had died. This is the context of verse 13: *“But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.”*

In the next verses, we see that those who have died will be resurrected as Jesus was resurrected:

For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord’s word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep (1 Thessalonians 4:14–15 NIV).

Paul continued to encourage his listeners not to despair about those who had died, saying that they would actually be resurrected and transformed even before the living are! *“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise¹ first” (1 Thess. 4:16 NKJV).*

Prior to the invention of the rapture doctrine in the 1830s, all published commentators interpreted First Thessalonians 4:13–18 as referring to the resurrection. For example, Matthew Henry’s commentary on this passage, written in 1721, says:

¹ In this passage, the word translated as “rise” is the same Greek word that is often translated “be resurrected.”

They shall be raised up from the dead, and awakened out of their sleep, for God will bring them with him, v 14. They then are with God, and are better where they are than when they were here; and when God comes he will bring them with him. The doctrine of the resurrection and the second coming of Christ is a great antidote against the fear of death and inordinate sorrow for the death of our Christian friends...²

Matthew Henry, along with nearly all other commentators prior to John Darby (the inventor of the modern rapture doctrine³), saw the obvious intention of this passage as referring to the resurrection of the dead at the final coming of Christ, not to a secret rapture seven years prior to the resurrection.

This is the same resurrection that Paul spoke of in First Corinthians 15:51–54:

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

² Henry, 1 Thessalonians 4.

³ Appendix 4 provides more details on the development of Darby’s futurist eschatology.

First Thessalonians 4:17–18 are the two verses that are most quoted when speaking of the rapture concept:

Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words (NIV).

Yet, the context in this passage did not change. Paul was still comforting a first century church under persecution. He was still instructing them regarding their dead friends and relatives; he had not begun to explain a secret rapture two thousand years in the future. It is clear Paul was talking about the final resurrection and how we will all be caught up together with the Lord, after which the books will be opened for the final judgment.

The famous commentator Adam Clarke gives a clear summary of this passage to the Thessalonians:

The Lord himself—That is: Jesus Christ shall descend from heaven; shall descend in like manner as he was seen by his disciples to ascend, i.e. in his human form, but now infinitely more glorious; for thousands of thousands shall minister unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand shall stand before him; for the Son of man shall come on the throne of his glory: but who may abide the day of his coming, or stand when he appeareth?

With a shout—Or order, εν κελευσματι· and probably in these words: Arise, ye dead, and come to judgment; which order shall be repeated by the archangel, who shall accompany it with the sound of the trump of God, whose great and terrible blasts, like those on mount Sinai, sounding louder

and louder, shall shake both the heavens and the earth!

Observe the order of this terribly glorious day:

1. Jesus, in all the dignity and splendor of his eternal majesty, shall descend from heaven to the mid region, what the apostle calls the air, somewhere within the earth's atmosphere.

2. Then the *κελευσμα*, shout or order, shall be given for the dead to arise.

3. Next the archangel, as the herald of Christ, shall repeat the order, Arise, ye dead, and come to judgment!

4. When all the dead in Christ are raised, then the trumpet shall sound, as the signal for them all to flock together to the throne of Christ. It was by the sound of the trumpet that the solemn assemblies, under the law, were convoked; and to such convocations there appears to be here an allusion.

5. When the dead in Christ are raised, their vile bodies being made like unto his glorious body, then,

6. Those who are alive shall be changed, and made immortal.

7. These shall be caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air.

8. We may suppose that the judgment will now be set, and the books opened, and the dead judged out of the things written in those books.

9. The eternal states of quick and dead being thus determined, then all who shall be found to have made a covenant with him by sacrifice, and to have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, shall be taken to his eternal

glory, and be for ever with the Lord. What an inexpressibly terrific glory will then be exhibited! I forbear to call in here the descriptions, which men of a poetic turn have made of this terrible scene, because I cannot trust to their correctness; and it is a subject which we should speak of and contemplate as nearly as possible in the words of Scripture.⁴

From this examination, we can clearly see that there is no secret pre-tribulation rapture in First Thessalonians 4, but there is a clear presentation of the resurrection of the dead before the final judgment.

Passage #2: Matthew 24:40–41

Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left (Matthew 24:40–41 NKJV).

As noted previously, this passage refers to the random killings perpetrated by the Romans at their siege of Jerusalem in AD 70. The Romans would hack one farmer in half and leave the farmer standing next to him shaking with fear; this was the terrifying fulfillment of Matthew 24:40–41.

Passage #3: Revelation 4:1

After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, “Come up here, and I will show you things

⁴ Clarke, 1 Thessalonians 4.

which must take place after this” (Revelation 4:1 NKJV).

This verse *is not* a metaphor; it is a record. John *was not* telling his readers that they would be sucked up before the throne but that he was! John was not speaking of the rapture. Many have said John was speaking of the rapture because the Church is not mentioned anymore in Revelation 4–19.

Gary DeMar does a great job dissecting this worn out argument that the Church must be raptured in Revelation 4:1 because the word *church* doesn’t reappear in chapters 4–19 of Revelation. He starts by pointing out that the saints are referred to over eleven times in Revelation 4–19 (see Rev. 5:8; 8:3–4; 11:18; 13:7,10; 14:12; 16:6; 17:6; 18:24; 19:8), and then he demolishes this interpretation by applying it to the rest of the New Testament:

Let’s continue by applying [Hal] Lindsey’s hermeneutical logic to other passages. The words church and churches appear just once in the Book of Hebrews (12:23) and twice in 2 Corinthians (1:1 and 2:14). The church is not mentioned as such in Mark, Luke, John, 2 Timothy, Titus, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, or Jude, and not until chapter 16 of Romans. Unless we are prepared to relegate large chunks of the NT to a limbo of irrelevance to the Church, we cannot make the mention or omission of the term ‘church’ a criterion for determining the application of a passage to saints of the present age.⁵

Similarly, even John Walvoord, an avid teacher of the secret pre-tribulation rapture of the Church, writes of Revelation 4:1:

⁵ DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, 218.

It is clear from the text that this is not an explicit reference to the Rapture of the church, as John was not actually translated [raptured]; in fact he was still in his natural body on the island of Patmos. He was translated into scenes of heaven only temporarily. Though there is no authority for connecting the Rapture with this expression, there does seem to be a typical representation of the order of events, namely, the church age first, then the Rapture, then the church in heaven.⁶

Passage #4: Revelation 12:5

She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne (Revelation 12:5 NKJV).

The context of this reference is the ascension of Christ, not the rapture of the Church. The word *Child* is capitalized because it refers to Christ. Also, He is the one who rules all nations with a rod of iron (see Ps. 110). He is the one who ascended to God and sits on His throne in Heaven. This is not a reference to a secret rapture of the Church.

Getting Caught Up

Since we have addressed all the passages used to teach the rapture concept, I would like to approach this topic briefly from another angle. First Thessalonians 4:17 says we will meet the Lord in the air. That statement begs the question, *Where is the air?* According to the Greek root word translated as “air,” this is a reference to the air that surrounds us on the earth. Many have taken this to mean that we will meet the Lord in the sky, but actually, there is

⁶ Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 103.

less and less air the higher one goes. It makes more sense that we would meet Him here, in the atmosphere.

The Thessalonian passage also says that we will *meet* the Lord (see 1 Thess. 4:17); the Greek word translated as “meet” is used several times in the New Testament. It always has the meaning of *welcoming* someone, especially like welcoming a king or dignitary. We are going to be welcoming King Jesus to earth when He returns.

This passage also speaks of being *caught up* (see 1 Thess. 4:17). The Scripture teaches that Jesus has been resurrected and given His glorious body. I suggest that this means that if I am “caught up,” it would be similar to what would happen if Jesus and I were in a footrace, He had run twenty miles, and I had only run two miles. If Jesus were to stop and wait for me, once I had run an additional eighteen miles, I would be “caught up.”

Like the apostle John said, “...*We know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him*” (1 John 3:2). We have not been resurrected and given our glorious bodies yet; presently, there is a great disparity between Jesus and us. We must get “caught up!” Christ will be equally yoked to His Bride, the Church (see 2 Cor. 6:14–16). When He appears, we will instantly be caught up to His likeness in the twinkling of an eye (see 1 Cor. 15:52). Tying this all together, we see that when Jesus returns to earth, we will meet (welcome) Him in the air (atmosphere) and be caught up (in His likeness) together. Technically, I do believe in the rapture of the Church, in that there will be a day in the future when we are all changed in the twinkling of an eye. This will be when we receive our glorious bodies. However, I do not believe in the rapture as it is commonly taught.

Lastly, it is important to note that the very leaders who teach the secret rapture doctrine have admitted that they

have no scriptural foundation for their doctrine. For example:

One objection to the pre-Tribulation Rapture is that no one passage of Scripture teaches the two aspects of His Second Coming separated by the Tribulation. This is true. But then, no one passage teaches a post-trib or mid-trib Rapture, either.

—Timothy LaHaye⁷

It is scarcely to be found in a single book or sermon through the period of 1600 years! If any doubt this statement, let them search...the remarks of the so-called Fathers, both pre and post Nicene, the theological treatises of the scholastic divines, Roman Catholic writers of all shades of thought, the literature of the Reformation, the sermons and expositions of the Puritans, and the general theological works of the day. He will find the “mystery” conspicuous by its absence.

—H.A. Ironside⁸

Until Darbyism in the 1830s, the modern concept of the rapture was not taught, believed in, or even conceived of. Even after its advent, the rapture teaching didn't gain major traction until the Scofield Bible came out in 1909. It then became deeply ingrained in western thinking simply because it would be much nicer to be raptured than to live through another World War I, Great Depression, and World War II. The rapture fever spread, not because it is biblical, but because it was enticing to those who desired an escape the trauma of the early 1900s.

It is time to re-think and re-examine some of these long-held beliefs. Considering that even the leaders of the

⁷ LaHaye, 69.

⁸ Ironside, 50.

pre-tribulation rapture movement have admitted that they have no scriptural foundation for their doctrine, it is time for the modern rapture doctrine to get *left behind*. It is time to recognize the testimony of Scripture and Church history. I agree with the first 1800 years of Christian history that there is no secret rapture but that Paul was writing about the final return of Jesus, the resurrection, and judgment day.

Chapter Points

- First Thessalonians 4:13–18 was written to a church in persecution, comforting them regarding what had happened to their martyred friends after death and telling them of the future resurrection of the dead at the final coming of Christ.
- Matthew 24:40–41 speaks of the random killings that happened at the hands of the Roman soldiers during their attack on Jerusalem leading up to its destruction in AD 70.
- Revelation 4:1 is a record of John's actual experience, not a prophecy of coming events.
- Revelation 12:5 speaks of the ascension of Christ, not a rapture of the Church.
- The meaning of the original language in First Thessalonians 4:17 clearly shows that when Jesus returns to earth, we shall meet (welcome) Him in the air (atmosphere) and be caught up (in His likeness) together.

Discussion Questions

1. How do you imagine the rapture?

2. Do you have any personal or funny tales about the rapture?
3. Could First Thessalonians 4 actually be speaking about the resurrection on the final day? Why or why not?
4. How did you feel when you read the quote from Timothy LaHaye regarding the lack of biblical evidence for a secret rapture?

Chapter 13

The Apostolic Mission

**For the missing chapter, go to
WeltonAcademy.com and purchase the 3rd
edition of Raptureless.**

Appendix 1

A Word to Charismatics

The Bible is the ultimate test for all teachings and revelations. As I have traveled and taught, I have seen an atrocity committed countless times—mainly by charismatic Christians. That atrocity is the thought that experience trumps the Bible.

Although it would never be stated in such a way, many place more value and respect upon a “spiritual experience” than upon “theological training.” Theology (the study of God) is spoken of in derogatory terms, such as *head knowledge*, whereas spiritual experience is more highly valued as *heart knowledge*. I believe that all Christians should value experiential knowledge, as no one can even be a Christian without having had the supernatural experience of being born again. Yet all experiences are subject to being tested and evaluated by the Word of God. That is the challenge I desire to remind my fellow charismatics of. We must not believe every prophet, spirit, or prophecy; the Bible clearly tells us they must be tested and evaluated.

Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all; hold on to what is good (1 Thessalonians 5:20–21).

Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20–21).

But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to

you, let them be under God's curse (Galatians 1:8).

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world (1 John 4:1).

In the field of endtime teachings, our movement has displayed an incredible lack of discernment and deep gullibility. For example, one Charismatic TV preacher claims he knows his endtime teachings are right because he prays in tongues while studying. I have heard countless stories of brother so-and-so or sister-whomever who had a vision of the rapture, the antichrist, or a coming Great Tribulation. While it is possible this person did have a vision, this does not automatically mean it was from the Lord.

One of the biggest disagreements I run into when speaking with charismatics regarding the endtimes is a prophetic experience that someone had. Whether it is based on the stories of a beloved grandmother, a respected prophet, or an eight-year-old child who had a near death experience, charismatics are too often leaning their doctrine on experience rather than the study of the Word. But what happens when one eight-year-old child has a vision of the endtimes that disagrees with another eight-year-old child's vision of the endtimes? Then where do the charismatics turn?

Hopefully, they will be like the Bereans and study the Word rather than simply believing the experiences of others (see Acts 17:11). Whichever eight-year-old's experience aligns with the Word and sound doctrine—believe that one! (The other one may have had a vision from the devil or from the cheese eaten before bed. Or, as is the case in many of these stories, the vision was interpreted wrongly by the adult listeners. For example, the child may have seen a

great battle, and the adult listener interpreted this as an endtime battle when perhaps the Lord was simply showing the child the great spiritual conflict we are currently engaged in as believers.)

It is time for a revival of evaluating prophecy by the infallible truth of the Word.

Raptureless was written with the deepest respect for the Word of God and a passion for the Holy Spirit. I expect it will be revised many times in my lifetime as I continue to learn. Yet I believe the fundamental presuppositions laid out in the Statement of Faith are sound and hold up against the test of Scripture. Let us have the balance of knowing the Scripture and the power of God, that we might not go into error (see Matt. 22:29).

Sincerely,
Dr. Jonathan Welton

Appendix 2

The Return of the Nephilim

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WeltonAcademy.com and purchase the 3rd
edition of Raptureless.**

Appendix 3

The Coming of Elijah

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Appendix 4

How Did We Get Here?

When I was in my early teens, my brother worked at a Christian bookstore. He would often bring home the latest Christian movie releases, and we would enjoy getting to watch them long before others could. I remember when *Veggie Tales* first came out; what an amazing new era that brought. Finally the Battle of Jericho included slushies! This was a huge step forward from the *Superbook* and *McGee and Me* videos I grew up with, but I digress.

I remember when my brother brought home the videocassette of *The Thief in the Night*. That was a bit much for a fourteen-year-old! For many years, I had one clip from the movie stuck in my memory. In this memory clip, a big guy who looked like Santa and was wearing overalls had a giant endtimes chart covered with dragons and beasts from Revelation. I recently re-watched the whole *Thief in the Night* movie series on YouTube (Santa, dragons, and all), and my memory wasn't that far off.

Although it isn't as common today, the endtimes chart used to be a standard way of communicating about the end of the world. Each pastor and teacher had his or her own views mapped out on personal charts. Most famous are the antique *Clarence Larkin's Charts* (from the early 1900s).

In retrospect, I am very glad my family didn't celebrate Christmas with the Santa Claus tradition; otherwise, I would have been thinking of the big guy from the endtimes movie coming down my chimney with his dragon and beast wall charts.

Years later, the Holy Spirit began to reveal the truth about the endtimes to me. Considering my weird background of a "pan-millennial" ("It will all pan out...")

family and scary Christian movies, I wonder if He chuckled to Himself, knowing He really had a piece of work on His hands.

I began my study of the endtimes by studying the history of the many endtime views. To understand a belief system, it is very helpful to start by researching the history behind it. Through my study, I found that, throughout Church history, the majority of Bible teachers and theologians held to a similar view of the endtimes. Yet, in the last century, the western Church has fractured into teaching many differing views. Simply stated, from AD 30 to the 1500s, the majority of the Church had an optimistic view of the future—that the Kingdom of God was growing in the earth and would continue to do so until the final return of Christ.

The fragmentation of viewpoints began in the reformation of the 1500s. This eventually led to the modern Church believing in the rapture, a one-world antichrist ruler, and a seven-year global tribulation. Before the 1500s, none of these three points were understood the way they are taught today. Through study, I came to understand that the modern understanding is based more on a tradition from the 1800s than from a historical and biblically orthodox view. As I will show, the Church fathers of the first 1500 years had a biblical understanding that is very different than the modern understanding.

So where did the two roads diverge?

The Historical Development

The Reformation of the 1500s changed a lot of things, and unwittingly it eventually affected the endtime beliefs of much of the Church. In the early 1500s, Martin Luther railed against the Roman Catholic Church, and in his

passion, he called her the Whore of Babylon and the Beast. Gary DeMar gives us a big-picture view of this time period:

The Reformers, almost without exception, believed that the papal system was the antichrist, with the individual popes reflecting the spiritual application of Paul's description of the Man of Lawlessness of 2 Thessalonians 2. The papal antichrist view was written into the confessions of that era. The Westminster Confession of Faith (1643–47) declared that "There is no other head of the Church but the Lord Jesus Christ; nor can the Pope of Rome in any sense be head thereof; but is that Antichrist, the son of perdition, that exalteth himself in the Church against Christ, and all that is called God" (25.7).¹

To counter this, in 1585 a Jesuit priest by the name of Francisco Ribera published a 500-page work that placed Daniel 9:24–27, Matthew 24, and Revelation 4–19 in the distant future. This was the first teaching of this kind, and it is the foundation of many modern endtime views.² The significance of this new interpretation is that, rather than

¹ DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, 289.

² It is important to note that Luther was misusing those titles, which belonged in their first century fulfillment. But also Ribera did not represent the dominant historical view. Whenever doctrine is not formed out of deep study, considerable debate, much prayer, and the leading of the Holy Spirit, it stands suspect. This is especially true when doctrine is thrown together as a reactionary and defensive response. The dominant endtime view before the 1500s was that the majority of prophecies in the New Testament had been fulfilled by the AD 70 destruction. Some modern teachers try to counter this truth by saying that a Catholic Priest named Luis Del Alcazar was the first one to create this point of view as a reaction to Luther. It is true that Luis wrote a book about AD 70 fulfilling prophecy, but this was simply encapsulating the standard and dominant view into a solid book. This *was not* written as a new invention, whereas the book that Ribera wrote actually was a new and reactionary writing. See Varner, *Whose Right It Is*, Chapter 7, "A Fresh Historical Look at Dispensationalism."

seeing these passages as fulfilled, now Ribera was saying they were still future.

Historically speaking, Ribera's new view did not gain momentum. In fact, his writing was lost until 1826, when Samuel Maitland, librarian to the Archbishop of Canterbury, rediscovered Ribera's forgotten manuscript and published it for the sake of public interest and curiosity.

When the book resurfaced, a small group of ultra-conservatives, led by John Darby, began to take Ribera's book seriously and came under the influence of this thinking. John Darby and his contemporary, Edward Irving, became extremely vocal about their new theology of the endtimes and began to attract many followers. Their most important follower was C.I. Scofield, who later published these concepts in his famed Scofield Reference Bible.

The Scofield Bible was the most popular of its time because it was one of the earliest Bibles to contain a full commentary. It quickly became a standard for seminary students of the time. This continued unchallenged until the 1948 Latter Rain movement, which disagreed with the Scofield Reference Bible's claims that the spiritual gifts had ceased. The Pentecostals pushed back against these portions of the commentary, but still swallowed Ribera's endtime teachings without realizing the error.³

Then in 1961, Finis Dake published the Dake's Annotated Reference Bible, which continued to promote the same Darbyism as the Scofield Bible, and the Ryrie and MacArthur Study Bibles have continued this tradition of Darbyism.

³ Fr. Stephen Lourie, "Origin of Rapture Idea" (2011), *Saint George Orthodox Church*, <http://stgeorgepa.net/2011/05/origin-of-rapture-idea>. Also see Varner, *Whose Right It Is*.

Thus we see that when Martin Luther railed against the Roman Catholic Church, one priest reacted by writing a new doctrine. This began the belief that certain prophecies in the Bible have not yet been fulfilled!

The Timing of the New Doctrine

It is also important to consider the timing of John Darby's teaching ministry. During the 1830s, the Holy Spirit, through the Second Great Awakening, was stirring American churches to life with great fervor. At the same time, Satan was hard at work releasing distortions and false teachings into the earth. From the late 1700s to the late 1800s, a multitude of major false teachings were released into the Church. For example:

- Joseph Smith founded Mormonism in 1830 (in Palmyra, New York, a suburb of Rochester, New York, where Charles Finney was having his revival meetings at the same time).
- Charles Taze Russell founded the Jehovah's Witnesses in the late 1870s.
- The Fox Sisters founded Spiritualism in 1848 (which later became the foundation of the New Age Movement).
- The first Unitarian church began in Boston in 1785.
- Mary Baker Eddy founded the cult named Christian Science in 1879 (which was a blending of Swedenborgism, Mesmerism, and Metaphysics).⁴

During this time period, John Nelson Darby also brought forth his new endtime teachings. Since C.I.

⁴ Kenneth Boa, "Starting Over: Cultic Christianity—Reinventing the Faith," *Bible.org*, <http://bible.org/seriespage/starting-over-cultic-christianity-reinventing-faith>.

Scofield published Darby's beliefs in his Bible commentary notes, Darbyism has become the mainstream endtime teaching of many modern teachers. Yet many have never even considered where these beliefs came from.

The Last One Hundred Years

After the Scofield Reference Bible was published in 1909, the earth went through a deeply traumatic season: World War I, the Great Depression, and World War II. By the time this period of forty years was over, pessimistic Scofield-ism had deeply rooted itself in American thinking.

In fact, Darbyism led to apathy among the European churches when Hilter and Mussolini arose. Darbyism basically taught people to believe, "These men could be the antichrist; therefore, we should let them rise in power because this will lead to our soon rapture." For example, a booklet published in 1940 identified Mussolini as the antichrist, stating that he fulfilled forty-nine prophecies of the antichrist.⁵ Gary DeMar says of this era:

Many will recall widespread preaching during the World War II era that Mussolini or Hitler was the Antichrist. Since the slogan VV IL DUCE was widely used by Mussolini, and because the Roman numeral value of the slogan/title is 666, many were sure of positive identification.⁶

Dwight Wilson, author of *Armageddon Now!*, convincingly demonstrates that dispensational premillennialism (essentially Darbyism) advocated a "hands off" policy regarding Nazi persecution of the Jews during World War II. Since, according to dispensational views regarding Bible prophecy, "the gentile nations are

⁵ Woodrow, 148.

⁶ DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, 236.

permitted to afflict Israel in chastisement for her national sins,” there was little that should be done to oppose it. He continues:

Another comment regarding the general European anti-Semitism depicted these developments as part of the on-going plan of God for the nation; they were “Foregleams of Israel’s Tribulation.” Premillennialists were anticipating the Great Tribulation, “the time of Jacob’s trouble.” Therefore, they predicted, “The next scene in Israel’s history may be summed up in three words: purification through tribulation.” It was clear that although this purification was part of the curse, God did not intend that Christians should participate in it. Clear, also, was the implication that He did intend for the Germans to participate in it (in spite of the fact that it would bring them punishment) and that any moral outcry against Germany would have been in opposition to God’s will. In such a fatalistic system, to oppose Hitler was to oppose God....

Pleas from Europe for assistance for Jewish refugees fell on deaf ears, and “Hands Off” meant no helping hand. So in spite of being theologically more pro-Jewish than any other Christian group, the premillenarians also were apathetic—because of a residual anti-Semitism, because persecution was prophetically expected, because it would encourage immigration to Palestine, because it seemed the beginning of the Great Tribulation, and because it was a wonderful sign of the imminent blessed hope.⁷

⁷ Ibid., 412–413.

Then in 1948, Israel regained its independent statehood, which caused many to say Matthew 24:32–33 indicated when Israel became a state again the end was near.

Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door (Matthew 24:32–33).

In the next verse, it says, “Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened” (Matt. 24:34). Since the Bible teaches that a generation is forty years, this led millions of Christians to believe and teach the rapture would occur in 1988. Thus, Edgar Whisenant sold 4.5 million copies of his book, *88 Reasons Why Jesus Will Return in 1988*. Whisenant was quoted as saying, “Only if the Bible is in error am I wrong; and I say that to every preacher in town,” and “If there were a king in this country and I could gamble with my life, I would stake my life on Rosh Hashanah in 1988.”⁸

Whisenant’s predictions were taken seriously in some parts of the evangelical Christian community. As the great day approached, regular programming on the Christian Trinity Broadcast Network (TBN) was interrupted to provide special instructions on preparing for the rapture.⁹ When the predicted rapture failed to occur, Whisenant followed up with later books with predictions for various dates in 1989, 1993, 1994, and 1997.

At this point, some of the modern teachers have started to redefine what *generation* means. They say that the clock

⁸ Pamela Starr Dewey, “Edgar Whisenant’s 88 Reasons” (2011), *Field Guide to the Wild World of Religion*, <http://www.isitso.org/guide/whise.html>.

⁹ Ibid.

started at 1948, but since a forty-year generation is wrong, they are now saying a generation is seventy or even one hundred years.

In 1970, Hal Lindsey wrote *The Late Great Planet Earth*. He sold approximately 35 million copies and deeply affected a generation of pastors and leaders growing up in the Jesus People Movement of the early 1970s. The lasting fruit of this book has created a generation that believes more in Lindsey's mythology than understanding what the Bible and history actually teach. In his book, Hal Lindsey concluded that, since the United States was not mentioned in Daniel or Revelation, it would not be a major player on the world scene when the Great Tribulation happened. Based on his interpretation of various biblical texts, he also presumed that the European Economic Community (now the European Union) would become what he termed the "United States of Europe." This union would have ten members and would become, according to Lindsey, the revived Roman Empire, ruled by the antichrist, needed to fulfill Bible prophecy. Currently, the European Union has twenty-eight members.

Later, Hal Lindsey released another book titled *The 1980s: Countdown to Armageddon*, implying that the battle of Armageddon would happen soon. He even went so far as to say, "The decade of the 1980s could very well be the last decade of history as we know it,"¹⁰ and he suggested that the U.S. would be destroyed by a surprise Soviet attack. Not surprisingly, because of Lindsey's adamant insistence that the 1980s would usher in the Great Tribulation, the book was quietly taken out of print in the early 1990s. Lindsey, however, would not give up. In the early 1990s, he published *Planet Earth—2000 A.D.*, which warned

¹⁰ Lindsey, *The 1980s: Countdown to Armageddon*, 8.

Christians that they should not plan to still be living on earth by the year 2000.

Throughout his several books, Lindsey assumed that the Cold War would continue until the end and, in fact, play a significant part in the unfolding of endtime events. He even named Russia as the famous Gog of Revelation 20:8. Likewise, Lindsey believed the hippie culture of the 1960s and '70s would become the dominate culture in the United States, ultimately leading to the immorality and false religion "prophesied" to arise in the endtimes by various Bible passages. Clearly, none of these prophecies have come to pass, and many have been proven wrong due to the dates ascribed to them, yet Lindsey is still lauded by many Christians as a great modern prophet.

Then in 1995, the first of the mega-bestselling book series, *Left Behind*, was released. Due to the paranoia and fear regarding Y2K, Christians were primed for rapture fever. When all was said and done, Y2K was all hype, and 60 million copies of *Left Behind* had been sold (as well as three terrible feature length films that were similar in nature and theology to the *Thief in the Night* movie series of the 1970s).

Now we are in the new millennium, and it is high time that we begin to deeply question the modern endtime views. If a teacher has been proclaiming that the end of the world is coming soon for over forty years, we should stop paying attention. If a teacher has proclaimed over forty different people to be the antichrist, we should ignore him. The fact that these teachers wear suits and are on TV doesn't make them any less wrong than the crazy guy on the street corner wearing a sandwich board sign that reads, "The end is near!" If a teacher was a paranoid alarmist regarding Y2K, we shouldn't be concerned about that teacher's other futuristic proclamations.

In summary, the teaching that Jesus' words in Matthew 24, the prophecies of Daniel, and the Book of Revelation are all referring to future events is a *new concept*, which came as a reaction to the Reformation. It has become deeply imbedded in the American evangelical community, but it does not have the support of Church history or Scripture, as we will see.

Angry Letters

Since my first edition of *Raptureless*, I have found that there is almost nothing more contentious than writing history. History should be static truth, but since there are so many perspectives, this isn't the case. Therefore, rather than just writing the truth of history, I will intentionally quote from dispensational leaders so as to confirm that what I have written is accurate. (What I have described as Darbyism is theologically known as dispensationalism.)

Charles Ryrie, renowned dispensational theologian and author of the 1966 classic, *Dispensationalism*, writes:

Dispensationalists recognize that as a *system* of theology it is recent in origin.¹¹

He then argues that some pieces or elements that eventually were systematized into dispensationalism were present in the writing of early Church fathers. After giving a few examples, he writes:

It is not suggested, nor should it be inferred, that these early church fathers were dispensationalists in the later sense of the word. But it is true that some of them enunciated principles that later developed into dispensationalism, and it may be

¹¹ Ryrie, 63.

rightly said that they held to primitive or early dispensational-like concepts.

From this time [the 1100s] until after the Reformation [1500s], there were no substantial contributions to that which was later systematized as dispensationalism.¹²

Clearly, though Ryrie tries to connect dispensationalism to the historical teachings of the Church, that connection is very tenuous. As he admits, for over 400 years, not one of our Church fathers wrote anything that could be aligned with dispensational thought. My point is this: As a system of biblical interpretation, dispensationalism holds little weight historically.

The great commentator F.W. Farrar, who was writing in 1882, prior to the recent rise in futurism, described it this way:

There have been three great schools of apocalyptic interpretation: 1. The Preterists, who regard the book as having been mainly fulfilled 2. The Futurists, who refer it to events, which are still wholly future. 3. Those [Historicists] who see in it an outline of Christian history from the days of St. John down to the End of all things. The second of these schools—the Futurists—has always been numerically small, and at present may be said to be non-existent.¹³

Even Thomas Ice, the executive director of the Pre-Tribulation Research Center on the campus of Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia, recognizes Darby as the starting point and sees that people are coming full circle and moving back to an optimistic view (preterism). This he

¹² Ibid., 65.

¹³ Farrar, *The Early Days of Christianity*, vol. 2, chapt. 2.

wrote clearly in several letters to the preterist author John Bray:

Thomas Ice, in a letter to me [John Bray] dated September 20, 1989, said: “Many are moving toward a preterist interpretation of the Olivet Discourse and Revelation in our day. It is coming full cycle since the days of Darby. I have a very large collection of literature advocating that view, which was a very prominent view among both liberals and evangelicals 100–150 years ago.” And then he added in a letter of November 30, 1989, “I do think that dispensationalism will continue to grow increasingly unpopular as we head into the 1990’s.” (These statements do not mean that Dr. Ice himself is changing from a Dispensationalist—far from it; but they simply indicate that he recognizes the reality of what is going on today among those who are studying eschatology.)¹⁴

From this we can see that dispensationalism has been, at best, a fad that began with Darby in the mid-1800s and is already beginning to wane. Even leaders in the movement have noticed that the momentum has shifted toward the more biblical, historical, and optimistic view. If that is not enough proof, here are some simple evidences against dispensationalism based on Jesus’ mandate to judge the fruit.

Judge the Fruit

Jesus told us to judge the messages of various prophets by examining the fruit of their lives and the fruit of their prophetic words (see Matt. 7:15–20). With this in mind, now that we have seen that this modern endtime teaching is

¹⁴ Bray, *Matthew 24 Fulfilled*, 148.

a new phenomenon, we must also ask ourselves, *What fruit is coming from it?*

Twelve Fruits I Have Witnessed:

1. Love usually takes the back seat, while fear is emphasized. Sometimes the fear is covered over by a rapture escape or by divine protection from coming wrath.
2. All long-term thinking becomes limited. It becomes impossible to even prophesy beyond a few decades because of the supposed any-minute return of Christ.
3. It creates a fear of technology because that new GPS, computer, smartphone, laptop, or whatever might be used as the mark of the beast.
4. It harbors a fear of politics because the antichrist could be right around the corner.
5. It breeds an anti-culture view—to the point of irrelevancy. Yet, even the apostle Paul was able to quote from the popular culture of his own day (see Acts 17:28).
6. It discourages people from pushing forward in health, medicine, the environment, or technology because they reason, “Why would one work for the good of a world that is going to burn?”
7. It has created a bizarre form of Christian racism. Many have become pro-Israel to the point that no political thought is exercised. For example, if Israel were to mistreat her surrounding nations, many modern Christians would give them a free-pass because they are God’s “chosen people.” Christians have literally accepted a new form of pro-Israel and anti-Arab racism. Also, it breeds a suspicion toward other countries, producing anti-Russian and anti-Chinese attitudes among many Christians. This

Christian racism is rooted in a wrong understanding of the endtimes.

8. Hope is narrowed down to a rapture escape.
9. This endtime view is the seedbed of many cults and militias.
10. Many have turned to extended hours of fasting and prayer, to quick evangelism, and to looking for the rapture or the “signs of the times,” rather than studying and training for a lifetime of advancing the Kingdom.
11. This view doesn’t take the time texts of Scripture seriously or literally (for example, Matt. 23:36; 24:34).
12. It has birthed many silly conspiracies; it fits perfectly with those who believe in the Illuminati, the NWO, and other secret society theories.

Welton’s Wager

Considering these negative fruits of dispensationalist beliefs, I propose a wager. The mathematician, physicist, and Catholic philosopher, Blaise Pascal (1623–1662), proposed a famous wager that has become known as Pascal’s Wager or Pascal’s Gambit. I will paraphrase: *What if you chose to believe in God and live as if He exists? If you are right, then wonderful! But if you are wrong and you find out that you simply lived a healthy moral life, but were wrong about God, what have you lost?*¹⁵

I would like to propose Welton’s Wager based on the same logic. What if you chose to believe optimistically about the endtimes, raise godly kids, plan long-term, reject

¹⁵ Alan Hajek, “Pascal’s Wager” (2008), *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/pascal-wager>.

thoughts of fear, and work as a member of the Bride making herself ready (see Rev. 19:7)? Even if you are wrong and suddenly get raptured out, what have you lost? You will have been a good steward of what God put in your hands rather than sitting on your hands, burying your talents, and waiting for a rapture that may not come in your lifetime! If you spend your life in fear, trying to figure out dates and guess who the antichrist is, you will be held accountable for all that wasted living.

A final thought. Some say that having a fearful future motivates evangelism. Actually, most non-Christians just think we are nuts and don't want to join us. In fact, some famous atheists (for example Christopher Hitchens) are saying Jesus was a false prophet because His prophecy didn't happen in the first century (see Matt. 24:34).¹⁶ This is based on the popular dispensational belief that the events of Matthew 24 will happen in the future. Even when some people do get saved out of fear for the future, this is not the gospel of the Kingdom; Jesus never said to preach the endtimes. Many have been brought into Christianity through fear of hell, judgment, or rapture; they then have had to spend years untangling their spiritual walk from the fear into which they were birthed.

It is time to change our thinking.

¹⁶ Gary DeMar, "I Can Agree With These Atheists (Up to a Point)" (May 2, 2011), *American Vision*, <http://americanvision.org/4414/i-can-agree-with-these-atheists-upto-a-point>.

Appendix 5

The Israel of God

**For the missing chapter, go to
WeltonAcademy.com and purchase the 3rd
edition of Raptureless.**

Appendix 6

Statement of Endtime Beliefs

I believe in the optimistic view of the Kingdom of God being present and growing, as was taught and believed before the Darbyism of the 1830s became popular.

I believe when the New Testament writers spoke of the last days they were referring to the end of the old covenant age (AD 30–70), not the end of the world.

I believe when Jesus spoke of His *coming*, He was using Old Testament apocalyptic language to describe His *coming* in judgment upon Jerusalem in AD 70.

I believe Daniel's prophecy of seventy weeks was referring to Christ and completed by Christ. I do not believe Daniel 9 teaches a future seven-year Tribulation.

I believe the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 fulfilled the Great Tribulation, the day of vengeance, and the time of Jacob's trouble.

I believe in the return of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, and the final judgment. I do not believe in a secret rapture of Christians prior to the return of Christ.

I believe *antichrist* is a first century name for Gnosticism and perhaps other false teachings. I do not believe the Bible prophesies a future one-world ruler.

I believe the Beast of Revelation is a reference either to the person of Nero or the Roman Empire (depending on the context).

I believe the Israel of God, the *Ekklesia*, is and always has been the true inheritor of His covenant promises. This is not based on race but faith.

I believe the Kingdom of God arrived with Jesus' first coming and will fill the whole earth in preparation for His final return.

Appendix 7

Recommended Reading

I have categorized the following books so that you can find more information about any specific endtime topic. I hope you have enjoyed my book as a clear and concise introduction. I am not endorsing everything in each of the following books, but for the most part, each of them has been of benefit to me in my journey. Swallow the meat, spit out the bones. God bless!

A Good Overview and Introduction

The Last Days According to Jesus by R.C. Sproul

Last days Madness by Gary DeMar

Understanding Matthew 24

Is Jesus Coming Soon? by Gary DeMar

Matthew 24 Fulfilled by John L. Bray

The Great Tribulation by David Chilton

The Olivet Discourse Made Easy by Kenneth Gentry

The History of the Modern View

Whose Right It Is by Kelley Varner

10 Popular Prophecy Myths Exposed and Answered by Gary DeMar

Israel's Place in the Endtimes

Exploding the Israel Deception by Steve Wohlberg (Jewish Christian author)

Israel and Bible Prophecy by John L. Bray

10 Popular Prophecy Myths Exposed and Answered by Gary DeMar

Zion's Christian Soldiers? by Stephen Sizer

Ezekiel 36–38 (Gog and Magog)

Why the End of the World Is Not in Your Future by Gary DeMar

Zechariah 12 and 14

One chapter in *Last Days Madness* by Gary Demar

Dating the Writing of the Book of Revelation

Before Jerusalem Fell by Kenneth Gentry

The Early Church and the End of the World by Gary DeMar and Francis Gumerlock

Redating the New Testament by John A.T. Robinson

The Destruction of Jerusalem

Josephus: The Complete Works

The Destruction of Jerusalem by George Peter Holford

The Early Church Understanding of the Endtimes

The Early Church and the End of the World by Gary DeMar

The Antichrist

The Man of Sin of 2 Thessalonians 2 by John L. Bray

The Beast of Revelation Identified by Kenneth Gentry

Commentaries on the Book of Revelation

The Great Tribulation by David Chilton

Days of Vengeance by David Chilton

The Book of Revelation Made Easy by Kenneth Gentry

Navigating the Book of Revelation by Kenneth Gentry

Revelation for Everyone by N.T. Wright

The Art of Revelation by Jonathan Welton

The Seven Churches of Revelation by Jonathan Welton

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